



THE POST OFFICE

OF

FIFTY YEARS AGO

1837-1887

PS.

Toronto University Library

Presented by

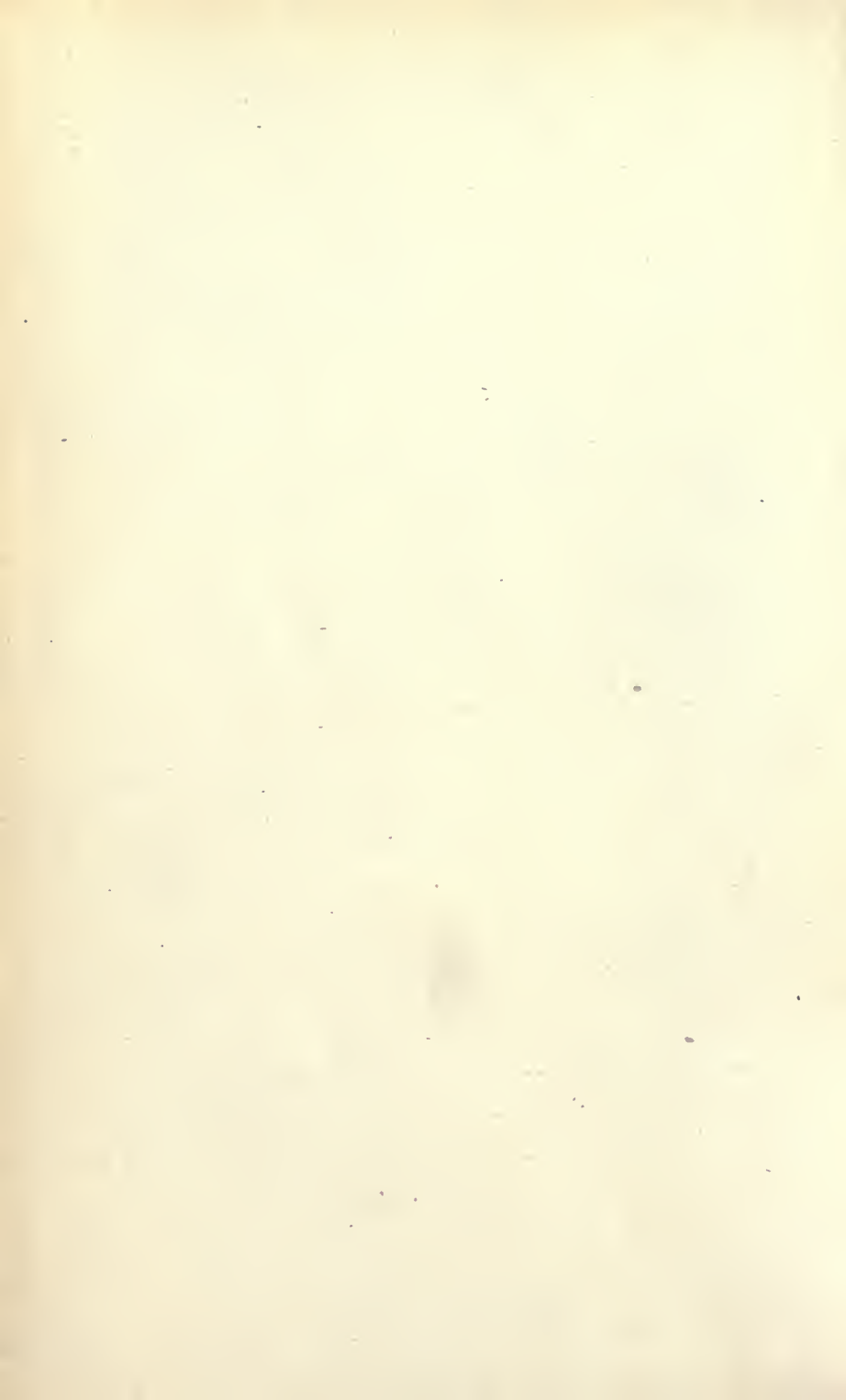
The Right Honorable, H. C. Koikes Esq. M.P.

through the Committee formed in

The Old Country

to aid in replacing the loss caused by

The disastrous Fire of February the 14th 1890



THE POST OFFICE

OF

FIFTY YEARS AGO.



Digitized by the Internet Archive
in 2007 with funding from
Microsoft Corporation



SIR ROWLAND HILL, K.C.B., D.C.L., F.R.S., F.R.A.S.
ORIGINATOR OF THE UNIFORM PENNY POSTAGE SYSTEM.

BORN DECEMBER 3, 1795; DIED AUGUST 27, 1879. BURIED IN WESTMINSTER ABBEY.

(From the "Graphic," Sept. 6, 1879.)

THE POST OFFICE OF FIFTY YEARS AGO:

CONTAINING REPRINT OF

SIR ROWLAND HILL'S FAMOUS PAMPHLET

DATED 22ND FEBRUARY, 1837,

PROPOSING PENNY POSTAGE,

WITH FACSIMILE OF THE ORIGINAL SKETCH FOR THE POSTAGE STAMP,
AND OTHER DOCUMENTS.



NOTE.—All profits on the sale of this Work go to the ROWLAND HILL
BENEVOLENT (POST OFFICE) FUND.

CASELL & COMPANY, LIMITED:
LONDON, PARIS, NEW YORK & MELBOURNE.

13312

6

CONTENTS.



	PAGE
THE POST OFFICE OF FIFTY YEARS AGO	1
SIR ROWLAND HILL'S PAMPHLET PROPOSING PENNY POSTAGE	49

THE POST OFFICE

OF

FIFTY YEARS AGO.

THE POST OFFICE OF FIFTY YEARS AGO.

AMONG the many beneficent measures for which the first fifty years of Her Majesty's reign will always be gratefully remembered, few, perhaps, have conferred greater blessings upon the public at large, especially upon the poorer classes, than the reforms effected during that period in our postal system—reforms which, commencing in the United Kingdom soon after Her Majesty's accession, have now been extended to every civilised country in the world.

It is just fifty years since Sir Rowland Hill, with whom the great reform originated, published (in February, 1837) his celebrated pamphlet, and in the belief that it will be interesting to many now rejoicing in Her Majesty's Jubilee to be enabled to glance for a moment at the condition in which the public found itself in postal matters at the commencement of her beneficent reign, we reprint the

pamphlet, giving at the same time a brief description of the older state of things, so that our readers may the more readily judge of the magnitude of the change which has been effected.

In these days, when postal facilities have so enormously extended, and cheap and rapid communication by letter has become so completely a part of our every-day life, like the air we breathe or the water we drink, few persons ever trouble themselves to think how it would be possible to exist without them; and those who are not old enough to remember the former state of things, under a postal system which the authorities at St. Martin's-le-Grand of that day regarded as almost a marvel of perfection, can hardly picture to themselves the inconvenience to which the public had then to submit.

As Miss Martineau points out in her *History of the Thirty Years' Peace (1815—1845)*, we look back now with a sort of amazed compassion to the old Crusading times, when warrior-husbands and their wives, grey-headed parents and their brave sons, parted with the knowledge that it must be months or years before they could hear even of one another's existence. We wonder how they bore the depth of silence, and we feel the same now about the families of polar voyagers, but, till the commencement of Her Majesty's reign, it did not occur to many of us how like this was the fate of the largest classes in our own country. The fact is,

there was no full and free epistolary intercourse in the country, except for those who, like Members of Parliament, had the command of franks. There were few families in the wide middle class who did not feel the cost of postage a heavy item in their expenditure; and if the young people sent letters home only once a fortnight, the amount at the year's end was a rather serious matter. But it was the vast multitude of the lower orders who suffered like the Crusading families of old and the geographical discoverers of all time. When once their families parted off from home, it was a separation almost like that of death. The hundreds of thousands of apprentices, of shopmen, of governesses, of domestic servants, were cut off from family relations as if seas or deserts lay between them and home.*

In those days, the visit of the postman, so far from being welcomed, was, as a rule, dreaded. Letters were almost always sent unpaid, and the heavy postage demanded for what might sometimes turn out to be merely trade circulars was a serious tax grudgingly paid, or, amongst the poorer classes, the letter had to be refused as too expensive a luxury.

The lowest postage on any letter, except those in the local town deliveries and their suburban posts, was 4d. This, however, would only suffice if the distance it was carried did not exceed 15 miles. The

* *Vide* Martineau's History of the Thirty Years' Peace, Vol. IV., p. 11.

THE POST OFFICE OF FIFTY YEARS AGO.

postage on Inland letters carried longer distances was regulated by the following scale:—

	PER "SINGLE" LETTER.
From any Post Office to any place not exceeding 15 miles from such office	d. 4
Above 15 and not exceeding 20 miles	5
" 20 " " 30 " 	6
" 30 " " 50 " 	7
" 50 " " 80 " 	8
" 80 " " 120 " 	9
" 120 " " 170 " 	10
" 170 " " 230 " 	11
" 230 " " 300 " 	12

Beyond that distance the postage increased at the rate of one penny per "single" letter for every additional 100 miles. One halfpenny was also charged on every letter crossing the Scottish border.

Under this scale the postage on any "single" letter from London to Brighton was 8d.; to Liverpool or Manchester, 11d.; to Edinburgh or Glasgow, 16½d.; and to Cork or Londonderry, 17d.

Only "single" letters, however—*i.e.*, letters written on a single sheet of paper—could pass at these rates. If an envelope or cover were used, or if the letter consisted of two pieces of paper, or contained any enclosure, the postage was at once doubled. Two enclosures involved treble postage. If, however, the letter, with or without enclosures, weighed an ounce, the postage was fourfold, and each additional quarter of an ounce in weight led to an additional rate of postage.

Thus, a letter just under 2 ounces in weight, which now goes from Land's End to John o' Groat's for $1\frac{1}{2}$ d., would, fifty years ago, have been charged sevenfold the heavy rates given in the above table. Such a letter, even if sent only from London to Croydon, would have been charged a postage of 2s. 4d.; if sent from London to Manchester, it would have been charged 6s. 5d.; while from London to Cork the postage would have been 9s. 11d., or nearly 80 times the present rate.

In order to ascertain whether letters contained enclosures, they were held up against strong artificial lights, many post offices in those days being built without windows, the better to facilitate such examination; and many letters got stolen in the post office through its being thus discovered that they contained bank-notes or other valuables.*

How seriously these high charges tended to suppress correspondence may be gathered from the fact that, except in the town and local "penny posts," where postage was comparatively low, the Post Office was but little used. Half the letters delivered in London fifty years ago were posted within 12 miles of St. Paul's, three-quarters within 100 miles, and only one-fourth in all the world besides.

As another illustration, which will perhaps bring this hindrance of correspondence more fully home to the present generation, it may be mentioned that

* For a remarkable case of this kind, see Sir R. Hill's pamphlet, Appendix, p. 72.

when, in 1827, Sir Rowland Hill, then a young man, was engaged to the lady who afterwards became his wife, the high rates of postage compelled them to restrict their correspondence to a letter once a fortnight.

Newspapers, in consideration probably of the large contributions they then made to the public revenue—*viz.*, a duty of 1s. 6d. on every advertisement, a paper duty at 1½d. a lb., and a newspaper stamp duty of 1d. or upwards on every copy printed—were allowed, as a rule, to circulate through the post without additional charge, though there were important exceptions to their enjoyment of this privilege. No newspaper could be posted in any provincial town for delivery within the same, nor anywhere within the London District (a circle of 12 miles radius from the General Post Office) for delivery within the same circle, unless a postage of one penny, in addition to the impressed newspaper stamp, were paid upon it—a regulation which, however, was constantly evaded by large numbers of newspapers, intended for delivery in London, being sent by newsagents down the river to be posted at Gravesend, the Post Office then having the trouble of bringing them back, and of delivering them without charge.

These restrictions have long been removed, the taxes levied on newspapers have all been abolished, a better daily paper is now to be had for a penny than that for which fivepence was charged fifty years ago, and newspapers can now be sent through the

post anywhere within the United Kingdom for one halfpenny—*i.e.*, for half the price then paid for the minimum stamp duty alone.

There was no “Book Post” in those days, printed matter, such as trade circulars, being charged the same as letters; and those persons who now declare it a “postal scandal” that they should be charged so extravagant a rate as one half-penny for the collection, conveyance, and delivery of two ounces of trade circulars sent from one end of the United Kingdom to the other—say from London to Cork or Londonderry—may find it profitable to reflect that the charge in 1837 for the same service would have been, in the instance we have given, nearly 240 times as much!—that is to say, somewhat distorting the meaning of the old proverb, they are now only “in for a penny” where formerly they would have been “in for a pound.”

As an instance of the extraordinary charges sometimes made under the old system, we may mention that in 1839 Sir John Burgoyne wrote to complain that, for a packet of papers sent to him at Dublin, which had been forwarded from some other part of Ireland by mail-coach, as a *letter*, instead of a *parcel*, he had been charged a postage of £11. That is to say, for a packet which he could easily have carried in his pocket, he was charged a sum for which he could have engaged the whole mail-coach—*i.e.*, places for four inside and three outside passengers, with their portmanteaus, carpet bags, &c.

Much evidence was produced before the Parliamentary Committee appointed in 1837 to inquire into Rowland Hill's scheme of postal reform, of the hardships which the high rates of postage caused to the poor.

Frauds, to evade postage, were daily practised upon the Post Office, and, where contraband conveyance was not available, letters were constantly refused on account of the heavy postage demanded, or remained many weeks in the postmaster's hands, when the persons to whom they were addressed were poor—mothers sometimes even pawning their clothes to pay for letters from their children, or having to wait till, little by little, they could save up the money necessary for that purpose.

Mr. Emery, Deputy-Lieutenant for Somersetshire, and a Commissioner of Taxes, stated, as evidence of the desire but inability of the poor to correspond, that—

“A person in my parish of the name of Rosser had a letter from a grand-daughter in London, and she could not take up the letter for want of the means. She was a pauper, receiving two-and-sixpence a week. * * * She told the post-office keeper that she must wait until she had received the money from the relieving officer ; she could never spare enough ; and at last a lady gave her a shilling to get the letter, but the letter had been returned to London by the post-office mistress. She never had the letter since. It came from her grand-daughter, who is in service in London.”

Struck by this fact, Mr. Emery made further

inquiries, and received the following statement from the postmaster of Banwell:—

“My father kept the post office many years ; he is lately dead ; he used to trust poor people very often with letters ; they generally could not pay the whole charge. He told me—indeed, I know—he did lose many pounds by letting poor people have their letters. We sometimes return them to London in consequence of the inability of the persons to whom they are addressed raising the postage. We frequently keep them for weeks ; and, where we know the parties, let them have them, taking the chance of getting our money. One poor woman once offered my sister a silver spoon to keep until she could raise the money ; my sister did not take the spoon, and the woman came with the amount in a day or two and took up the letter. It came from her husband, who was confined for debt in prison ; she had six children, and was very badly off.”

The following was reported by the postmaster of Congresbury:—

“The price of a letter is a great tax on poor people. I sent one, charged eightpence, to a poor labouring man about a week ago ; it came from his daughter ; he first refused taking it, saying it would take a loaf of bread from his other children ; but after hesitating a little time, he paid the money, and opened the letter. I seldom return letters of this kind to Bristol, because I let the poor people have them, and take the chance of being paid ; sometimes I lose the postage, but generally the poor people pay me by degrees.”

The postmaster of Yatton stated as follows:—

“I have had a letter waiting lately from the husband of a poor woman, who is at work in Wales ; the charge was ninepence ; it lay many days, in consequence of her not being able to pay the postage. I at last trusted her with it.”

Mr. Cobden stated :—

“ We have fifty thousand in Manchester who are Irish, or the immediate descendants of Irish ; and all the large towns in the neighbourhood contain a great many Irish, or the descendants of Irish, who are almost as much precluded as though they lived in New South Wales from all correspondence or communication with their relatives in Ireland.” *

Mr. Henson, a working hosier of Nottingham, stated :—

“ When a man goes on the tramp—*i.e.*, when he travels in search of employment—he must either take his family with him, perhaps one child in arms, or else the wife must be left behind ; and the misery I have known them to be in from not knowing what has become of the husband, because they could not hear from him, has been extreme. Perhaps the man, receiving only sixpence, has never had the means, upon the whole line, of paying tenpence for a letter, to let his wife know where he was.”

The average postage on a letter in 1837, even including the penny letters which circulated by the local posts, was as high as 6¼d., a sum which in those days formed a far larger fraction of a working man's daily wages than it now does ; and the difficulty the poor had in paying such a postage was well shown in the evidence of Mr. Brewin, of Cirencester, a member of the Society of Friends. “ Sixpence,” said he, “ is a third of a poor man's daily income. If a gentleman, whose fortune is a thousand pounds a year, or three pounds a day, had to pay one-third of his daily

* Life of Sir Rowland Hill and History of Penny Postage, Vol I., pp. 306-7.

income—that is to say, a sovereign—for a letter, how often would he write letters of friendship? ”*

Extravagant and almost prohibitive as were the postal charges in 1837, the service rendered by the Post Office in return was ludicrous for its slowness and inefficiency.

There was only one dispatch of mails from the country into London daily (the mail-coaches arriving at St. Martin's-le-Grand at about 6.30 a.m.), and there was only one dispatch from London in return ;—this left at 8 p.m. All letters passing through London, as, for instance, those from Brighton to Birmingham, were detained, all day long, at St. Martin's-le-Grand, and when Sunday (blank-post day) intervened, the delay was of course far greater.

Between towns near to each other on opposite sides of London, this delay and infrequency of communication rendered the Post Office almost useless. Thus a letter posted in Uxbridge on Friday evening, after the office had closed, would not be delivered at Gravesend—a distance of little more than 40 miles—till Tuesday morning, and for this service the minimum postage was sixpence.

Even if blank-post day did not intervene, and a letter was posted at Uxbridge on Monday morning, it would not be delivered at Gravesend till Wednesday ; and if the reply were immediately written and posted,

* Life of Sir Rowland Hill and History of Penny Postage, Vol. I., p. 305.

it would not be received till Friday—four days being then required, under the most favourable circumstances, for an exchange of communication per post which can now be effected in twenty-four hours.

Scotland and Ireland were even less well served by the Post Office than England and Wales, but even in this, the most favoured portion of the United Kingdom, there were, at the date of Her Majesty's accession, districts larger than Middlesex into which the postman never entered.

Of the 2,100 Registrars' Districts into which England and Wales were then divided, 400 districts, each containing on the average about 20 square miles, and about 4,000 inhabitants (making in all a population of about a million and a half) had absolutely no post offices whatever. The chief places in these districts, containing about 1,400 inhabitants each, were, on the average, about 5 miles, and in some instances as much as 16 miles, from the nearest post office.

Even in the London District, where postal facilities were better than in any other part of the country, the service was singularly slow and costly. A letter posted at any Receiving Office in the city after 2 p.m. was not delivered, even in Brompton, till next morning,* and the postage charged was 3d. per "single" letter.

* A letter can now be posted up to 6 p.m., and still be delivered the same evening.

THE POST OFFICE OF FIFTY YEARS AGO.

As regards postal communications with places abroad, it may suffice to record the fact that the lowest postage on a single letter to Paris was 1s. 8d., to Gibraltar it was 2s. 10d., and to Egypt, 3s. 2d. Any letter not exceeding half an ounce in weight may now be sent to these places for $2\frac{1}{2}$ d.

A letter just weighing an ounce can now be sent to Canada or the United States for 5d., but in 1837 the postage on such a letter was 8s. 8d., with a further charge for delivery on arrival.

A packet of manuscript accounts, weighing, say, $2\frac{3}{4}$ lbs., can now be sent to Canada or the United States, by book post, for 11d., but in 1837 the "reduced postage" on such a packet was £5. Nothing heavier than 3 lbs. could be sent at this "reduced" rate. If the packet weighed, say, $3\frac{1}{4}$ lbs., it was charged full letter postage—viz., £22 10s. 8d., the present charge for such a packet being only thirteen pence.

The mails to North and South America, India, and other places beyond seas, were in 1837 conveyed by sailing vessels only, those to New York being conveyed by gun-brigs, starting from Falmouth, the voyage frequently occupying many weeks; and mails were made up in London for North and South America, the Cape of Good Hope, and India, only once a month.

The slow-sailing packets have long ago been superseded by swift steam vessels, and in place of the single monthly dispatch, the mails to India are now

four a month, and to the United States four a week.

With such indifferent postal facilities, our readers will not be surprised to learn that in England and Wales, at the commencement of Her Majesty's reign, each person received, on the average, a letter only once in three months; in Scotland, only once in four months; and in Ireland, only once a year. The business of the Post Office, in those days, instead of keeping pace, as it does now, with the growth of population and trade, had become stationary, no increase whatever having taken place in either the gross or net revenue of the Post Office during the twenty years ending with 1835.

Such was the state of things when Mr. (afterwards Sir) Rowland Hill, rather more than fifty years ago, turned his attention seriously to the question of postal reform.

It is a remarkable fact that until Sir Rowland Hill had thoroughly imbued the Post Office with his own earnestness for improvement, nearly all the great reforms effected in the postal service originated with persons wholly unconnected with that department—Mr. Dockwra, who in the time of the Commonwealth instituted the town and local "penny posts," Mr. Allen, who about the year 1750 established cross posts, and Mr. Palmer, who in 1784 effected the substitution of mail coaches for horse and foot posts, having all been "outsiders;" and history again repeated itself in the case of Sir Rowland Hill, who,

until his plan had been some time in operation, had never been inside the walls of any post office—a request of his, in 1836, while preparing his plans, to be permitted to see the working of the London Post Office having been politely refused.

Some two or three years before this date, Mr. Robert Wallace, M.P. for Greenock, had, in Parliament, commenced a series of bold attacks upon the postal administration, and had succeeded in breaking down the prestige which, ever since Palmer's great improvements, that department had enjoyed as a mysterious and almost perfect organisation. Mr. Wallace had compelled the Post Office to adopt many minor improvements, but the supposed necessity of protecting the Post Office revenue from any serious loss caused Postmasters-General and Chancellors of the Exchequer to set their faces firmly against all demands for a general reduction in the rates of postage.

Sir Rowland Hill had taken great interest in the question, and had come to the conclusion that the postage rates charged the public were far too high, even if revenue, and not public convenience, were the primary object for which the Post Office was maintained.

Fortunately, in the financial year ending March 31, 1836, there was a considerable excess of revenue of the country generally over the expenditure, thus leaving a good surplus at the disposal of the Chancellor of the Exchequer, and, as is usual in such

cases, there was much speculation as to what remissions of taxation might be granted. This seemed to Sir Rowland Hill to afford a good opportunity for pressing for a reduction in the rates of postage (the high rates then levied being, in fact, a heavy tax on all commercial and social communications), and in order to satisfy himself what reductions might be possible, he set to work carefully to ascertain the actual cost which the Post Office had to incur in the collection, conveyance, and delivery of letters, and it was in the course of this analysis that he discovered the startling and hitherto unsuspected fact that the actual cost of conveyance *per letter*, from one post town to another, was not, as had hitherto been supposed, a large fraction of the total cost incurred, and roughly proportionate to the distance the letters were carried, but was so exceedingly small that it might fairly be disregarded, and that a uniform rate of postage, with all its manifold advantages of simplicity, was not only practicable, but even fairer than one in any way dependent upon distance.

How Sir Rowland Hill arrived at this discovery, and demonstrated that by improved arrangements the lowest rate of postage then charged—*viz.*, one penny — would suffice for all inland letters of moderate weight, even for those carried the longest distance, will be gathered from a perusal of his pamphlet.

Uniformity of postage, doubtless, at the present

time, seems to most persons so completely in accordance with the fitness of things, that it may appear strange when we state that in 1837 it was so startling an innovation that, when publishing his pamphlet, Sir Rowland Hill thought it prudent to reject a suggestion to entitle it "Uniform Penny Postage," fearing lest the mere title should cause people to throw away the pamphlet unread, as something too ridiculous to deserve perusal. He, therefore, adopted the more modest heading of "Post Office Reform—Its Importance and Practicability," and it was not until the reader had been carefully led, step by step, to the point where no other conclusion would have been logical, that uniformity of postage was suggested.

So difficult, indeed, at that time, was it to convince even intelligent people that this was the true principle, that even after the pamphlet had been widely circulated, and a Parliamentary Committee had heard all the evidence in its favour, the adoption of uniformity of charge was only carried in Committee by the casting-vote of the chairman.

The difficulty the Committee had may perhaps be best understood by the present generation, if they bear in mind that Sir Rowland Hill's proposition to charge letters going long distances no more than those posted and delivered in the same town, was at least as great a departure from what was then believed to be the natural and proper arrangement, as a proposition would be now-a-days, to adopt the lowest railway passenger fare as a uniform charge for all distances.

To many of the present generation, especially to those who are afflicted with the mania for collecting postage-stamps, it will doubtless be interesting to read the earliest propositions for their adoption. Stamped envelopes, for prepayment of postage, are said to have been in use in Paris as far back as the year 1653, but they seem soon to have fallen into disuse, possibly because prepayment of postage was then, in France, as contrary to long-established custom as in 1837 it was in this country, and no advantage by way of reduced postage appears to have been offered to secure prepayment. At all events, their existence had long been forgotten, and was certainly unknown to Mr. Charles Knight, the eminent publisher, who about the year 1834 revived the idea, by proposing that stamped wrappers should be employed as a substitute for the impressed newspaper stamp, as is explained in Sir Rowland Hill's pamphlet.

Mr. Charles Knight's valuable idea, modified by Sir Rowland Hill's happy suggestion (given in his evidence before the Commissioners of Post Office Inquiry on 13th of February, 1837*) of making the stamp adhesive "by using a bit of paper just large enough to bear the stamp, and covered at the back with a glutinous wash, which . . . by applying a little moisture," might be attached to the letter,† was

* See Ninth Report of the Commissioners of Post Office Inquiry, pp. 32—33. See also Sir Rowland Hill's pamphlet, p. 45.

† "Mr. Hill, adopting Mr. Knight's suggestion, has applied it to the general purposes of the Post Office with an ingenuity and

the little seed which has now attained so gigantic a growth.*

Prepayment of postage by means of stamps has now become so universal a practice that to many persons it may seem incredible that, in 1839, Sir Francis Baring, and some other earnest advocates of Sir Rowland Hill's reforms, believed it would be almost impossible to induce the public to prepay their letters. This necessary change of habit was, indeed, regarded by them as a dangerous rock ahead, upon which the scheme might possibly be wrecked. To prepay a letter in those days (unless addressed to a person of very inferior social position) was considered quite as contrary to good manners as it would now be for one gentleman, when writing to another, to enclose a address which make it his own."—*Quarterly Review*, No. 128, p. 555.

* Postage stamps were first used in the United Kingdom on 6th May, 1840. They were manufactured by Messrs. Perkins, Bacon, and Petch, of 69, Fleet Street, who for forty years retained the contract for supplying the penny and two-penny labels—these constituting more than nine-tenths of all the postage stamps employed. The number of stamps produced by them in the forty years amounted to the enormous total of nearly twenty-three thousand millions, sufficient, if placed in line, to encircle the world fifteen times over. In 1855, Messrs. Delarue & Co., of 110, Bunhill Row, also commenced the manufacture of postage stamps, having obtained the contract for the fourpenny labels. Gradually the whole work of making postage stamps for this country and most of its colonies has been entrusted to the latter firm.



FACSIMILE OF THE ORIGINAL SKETCH FOR THE POSTAGE STAMP.

stamp for his reply. The fact that the postman had to collect the postage on delivery was also regarded as affording almost the only security that letters sent by post would ever reach their destination. In Sir R. Hill's pamphlet it was found necessary to deal with this supposed difficulty at considerable length. (See Appendix, p. 96.) The great reduction of postage, however, reconciled the public to the change.

Under the old postal system, to have attempted to secure prepayment, especially by means of stamps, would have been hopeless and objectless; yet many persons, trusting to their supposed recollection, have from time to time come forward to assert that they had suggested postage stamps long before Sir Rowland Hill's reforms gave the opening for them. Possibly they also believe they suggested first-class return tickets before railways were invented. Postage stamps, under the old system, when practically no one dreamed of prepaying his letters, would not only have been utterly useless, but if a stamp had been stuck upon an ordinary "single" letter, double postage would at once have become chargeable, as the letter would then have consisted of two separate pieces of paper.*

* The late Dr. J. E. Gray, of the British Museum (of whose honesty, as distinguished from failing memory, no question could arise), has claimed to have suggested adhesive postage stamps as early as 1833-4. Claims of similar character are more fully noticed at p. 36.

THE RECEPTION OF THE PLAN AND ITS RESULTS.

ALTHOUGH, if strict chronological order were observed, Sir Rowland Hill's pamphlet should here be given, it will probably be more convenient to many readers if we first complete this narrative by a short account of the manner in which his proposals were received, and of the results which his reforms have now produced.

By the Post Office authorities the scheme was met with the most determined hostility, one high official stating that, in his opinion, there was no portion of the plan that could be adopted with advantage either to the revenue or to the public, while the Postmaster-General (Lord Lichfield) declared that "of all the wild and visionary schemes he had ever heard or read of, it was the most extraordinary." The Secretary of the Post Office did not believe the people would write more letters even if they were carried for nothing; the Postmaster-General, on the contrary, declared that the amount of correspondence would be so enormous as to be quite unmanageable, and that the walls of the Post Office would burst—an observation that laid his lordship open to Sir Rowland Hill's sarcastic rejoinder that he was sure the Postmaster-General, on reconsideration, would have no difficulty in deciding whether, in this great and commercial country, the size of the Post Office was to be regulated by the amount of correspondence, or the amount of correspondence by the size of the Post Office.

That the Government was opposed to his scheme

was, however, no news to Sir Rowland Hill. Early in January, 1837, he had, through Mr. Charles P. Villiers, then and still Member of Parliament for Wolverhampton, privately submitted the plan to the Chancellor of the Exchequer (Mr. Spring Rice)—offering, indeed, to let the Government have the whole credit of the reform, if they cared to take it up—a course, however, which they were too timid to adopt.*

By the public at large the scheme was welcomed with enthusiasm. Meetings in support of it were called throughout the country, and petitions for its adoption poured in upon Parliament. Mr. Robert Wallace, M.P., gave the question his heartiest support, and moved for and obtained a Parliamentary Committee to inquire into the scheme.

In London a strong Committee, known as "The Mercantile Committee," was formed under the Chairmanship of Mr. Bates, of the firm of Baring Brothers, containing many influential gentlemen, amongst whom the name of Mr. George Moffatt, afterwards M.P. for Southampton, deserves especial mention. Of this Committee Mr. (afterwards Sir) Henry Cole was the energetic Secretary, and he and it gave valuable assistance in pressing the reform on the attention of the public and the Government.

As already stated, one great difficulty was to convince the Parliamentary Committee of the fairness of

* Vide Life of Sir Rowland Hill and History of Penny Postage, Vol. I., p. 263.

adopting a uniform rate of postage, and this vital principle was only carried at last by the casting-vote of Mr. Robert Wallace, the Chairman; but even then the scheme was nearly wrecked, for the proposal that the uniform rate should be one penny was negatived by six votes against three. A three-half-penny rate was then proposed, but rejected; but a twopenny rate was finally adopted by the Committee, though this again was only carried by the Chairman's casting-vote. The report of the Committee therefore recommended the twopenny rate.

To any persons interested in postal history, this long-forgotten blue book (Third Report of the Select Committee on Postage, 1838) will amply repay perusal. It was written by Mr. Henry Warburton, a member of the Parliamentary Committee, and a most earnest friend to the measure; and though in obedience to the vote of the Committee a twopenny rate is proposed, any one able to read between the lines can easily see that the facts and conclusions of that report undoubtedly show that the rate which ought logically to be adopted was the penny.

Notwithstanding the favourable report of the Committee, the Government were reluctant to move in the matter, and little, probably, would at that time have been done but for a lucky chapter of accidents.

On the 9th April, 1839, Lord Melbourne's Government brought in what is generally known as the Jamaica Bill—a Bill for suspending for five years the constitution of that colony. This measure was

strongly opposed by the Conservative party (led by Sir Robert Peel), and by many of the Radicals. On the second reading of the Bill, the Government only escaped defeat by the narrow majority of five votes. The Ministry thereupon resigned; Sir Robert Peel was sent for by Her Majesty, but owing to the "Bed-chamber Difficulty" failed to form a Government. Lord Melbourne was recalled, and in the negotiations with the Radical members for future support to his Government, the bargain was struck that that support should be given, provided Penny Postage was conceded.

Thus one of the greatest social reforms ever introduced was, to speak plainly, given as a bribe by a tottering Government to secure political support.

The Act authorising the adoption of the Uniform Penny Postage system received Her Majesty's assent on the 17th of August, 1839, and, in order to carry it into effect, Sir Rowland Hill was appointed to a temporary office in the Treasury; a somewhat undignified attempt being made by the Government to get him to accept a salary wholly inadequate, under circumstances sufficiently explained in the following letter from his brother, Mr. Matthew Davenport Hill, whom he had consulted on the matter. This letter, it may be added, foreshadowed, with considerable accuracy, the difficulties with which the path of Postal Reform was, for many years afterwards, constantly obstructed.

THE POST OFFICE OF FIFTY YEARS AGO.

Leicester, Sept. 12, 1839.

DEAR ROWLAND,

Before I give you my opinion, I think it better to prevent the possibility of misapprehension, by putting in writing the heads of what you have reported to me as having occurred at the interview between the Chancellor of the Exchequer and yourself on Tuesday, respecting your proposed employment by the Government in carrying your plan of Post Office reform into operation.

You state that Mr. Baring, having regard to what had been arranged between Lord Monteagle and himself, offered to engage your services for two years for the sum of £500 per annum; you, for that remuneration, undertaking to give up your whole time to the public service. That on your expressing surprise and dissatisfaction at this proposal, the offer was raised to £800, and subsequently to £1000 per annum. You state that your answer to these proposals was, in substance, that you were quite willing to give your services gratuitously, or to postpone the question of remuneration until the experiment shall be tried; but that you could not consent to enter upon such an undertaking on a footing in any way inferior to that of the Secretary to the Post Office. You explained, you say, the object which you had in view in making this stipulation—you felt that it was a necessary stipulation to insure you full power to carry the measure into effect.

I have carefully considered the whole matter in all its bearings, and I cannot raise in my mind a doubt of the propriety of your abiding by these terms; and I will set down, as shortly as I can, the reasons which have occurred to me to show that the course you have taken was the only one really open to you.

It is quite clear that to insure a fair trial for your plan you will require great powers; that Ministers will not interfere with you themselves, nor, as far as they can prevent it, suffer you to be thwarted by others, I can readily

believe; but I am not so sure of their power as I am of their goodwill. You have excited great hostility at the Post Office—that we know as a matter of fact; but it must have been inferred if the fact had not been known. It is not in human nature that the gentlemen of the Post Office should view your plan with friendly eyes. If they are good-natured persons, as I dare say they are, they will forgive you in time; but they have much to overlook. That a stranger should attempt to understand the arcana of our system of postage better than those whose duty it was to attain to such knowledge, was bad enough; that he should succeed, was still worse; but that he should persuade the country and the Parliament that he had succeeded is an offence very difficult to pardon. Now, you are called upon to undertake the task of carrying into action, through the agency of these gentlemen, what they have pronounced preposterous, wild, visionary, absurd, clumsy, and impracticable. They have thus pledged themselves, by a distinct prophecy, repeated over and over again, that the plan cannot succeed. I confess I hold in great awe prophets who may have the means of assisting in the fulfilment of their own predictions. Believe me, you will require every aid which Government, backed by the country, can give you to conquer these difficulties. You found it no easy task to defeat your opponents in the great struggle which is just concluded; but what was that to what you are now called upon to effect? no less an enterprise than to change your bitter enemies into hearty allies, pursuing your projects with goodwill, crushing difficulties instead of raising them, and using their practical knowledge, not to repel your suggestions and to embarrass your arrangements, but using the same knowledge in your behalf, aiding and assisting in those matters wherein long experience gives them such a great advantage over you, and which may be turned for or against you at the pleasure of the possessors.

To try this great experiment, therefore, with a fair chance of success, it must be quite clear that you have

the confidence of the Government; and that can only be shown by their advancing you to an equality, at least, with the principal executive officer among those with whose habits and prejudices you must of necessity so much and so perpetually interfere. Have you made Mr. Baring sufficiently aware of the numerous—I might say numberless—innovations, which your plan of necessity implies? The reduction of postage and the modes of prepayment are, no doubt, the principal features of your plan; but you lay great stress, and very properly, in my opinion, on increasing the facilities for transmitting letters; and this part of the reform will, I apprehend, cause you more labour of detail than that which more strikes the public eye. In this department you will be left to contend with the Post Office almost alone. It will be very easy to raise plausible objections to your measures, of which Ministers can hardly be supposed to be competent judges, either in respect of technical information or of leisure for inquiry. Neither would the public, even if you had the means and inclination to appeal to it, give you assistance in matters upon which you could never fix its attention.

But your personal weight and importance as compared with that of others who it is reasonable to believe will, in the first instance at least, be opposed to you, will be measured very much by comparison of salary. We may say what we will, but Englishmen are neither aristocratic nor democratic, but chrysocratic (to coin a word). Your salary will, therefore, if you have one at all, fix your position in the minds of every functionary of the Post Office, from the Postmaster-General to the bellman, both inclusive.

But though I see these insuperable objections to your accepting either of the salaries which have been offered, I will not advise you (and you would reject such advice if I gave it) to embarrass the Government, if there be any difficulty, which there may be unknown to us, in the way of their either giving you a higher salary, or postponing

the question of remuneration until the end of the two years. Your offer made on the spur of the moment, to surrender your present appointment, and work for the public without salary, though it does look somewhat "wild and visionary" at first sight, yet after a long and careful reflection upon it, I distinctly advise you to renew, and more than that, I seriously hope it will be accepted. Your fortune, though most men would consider it very small, is enough to enable you to live two years without additional income; and I feel certain that the Government and the country will do you and your family justice in the end; but suppose I should be mistaken, and that you never receive a shilling for either your plan or your services in carrying it into operation, I should be very glad to change places with you, and so would thousands of your countrymen, if, on taking your labours and privations, they could also feel conscious of your merit.

I remain, &c.,

M. D. HILL.

With reference to this letter, it is only right to add that Mr. (afterwards Sir) Francis Baring at once recognised the soundness of the views expressed therein, overruled all official objections, and placed Sir Rowland Hill's appointment on a proper footing.

To Sir Francis Baring, for his cordial support through a period of great difficulty, Sir Rowland Hill was deeply indebted. Many years after, when an old man, Sir Francis Baring stated that nothing gave him more satisfaction, when looking back upon his career, than the part he had taken in helping on the cause of Penny Postage.

On the 10th January, 1840, the Uniform Penny Postage System came into operation. Of the end-

less difficulties Sir Rowland Hill had to encounter in forcing his reforms down the throats of the authorities at St. Martin's-le-Grand, we need not here give any account. The story is told in the *Life of Sir Rowland Hill* published about seven years ago ; and the complete success of his postal scheme is now everywhere fully recognised.

It should, however, be stated that in 1842 the hostility of certain officials to the new reform rose to such a pitch that—by means which even at this length of time it would hardly be safe to describe—Sir Robert Peel's Government (then in power) was coerced into putting an end to Sir Rowland Hill's engagement at the Treasury. This was terminated in September, 1842 ; the excuse publicly given by the Government for so doing being that the new postal system was then working so well that Sir Rowland Hill's services were no longer necessary. As was characteristically stated by Thomas Hood at the time, "it would never surprise him, after such an instance of folly and ingratitude, to hear of the railway people some day, finding their trains running so well, proposing to discharge the engines."

With profuse expressions of the high sense the Government entertained of his personal character, and of the value of the services he had rendered to the public, Sir R. Hill was politely bowed out of office, and the new postal system handed over to the tender mercies of its worst enemies.

By the public this ungracious act was strongly

resented, and when, in 1846, Lord John Russell's Government came into power, a staff appointment at the Post Office was offered to Sir Rowland Hill, and accepted by him (though at a serious personal sacrifice), in order that he might complete his reforms.

Gradually official opposition died away (or was confined to small cliques, more or less troublesome, within the department), old opponents became converted into zealous helpers, postal reform sped swiftly on, and the minute of the Treasury on the occasion of Sir Rowland Hill resigning the Secretaryship of the Post Office in 1864—which we here append—shows how cordially his services were at last recognised even in the official world itself.

COPY OF TREASURY MINUTE GRANTING A SPECIAL SUPERANNUATION ALLOWANCE TO SIR ROWLAND HILL, K.C.B., SECRETARY TO THE GENERAL POST OFFICE.

TREASURY MINUTE, DATED 11TH MARCH, 1864.

READ letter from Sir Rowland Hill, K.C.B., dated the 29th February, stating that six months' absence having elapsed without any satisfactory results as regards the state of his health, he has now no course left but to resign his appointment as Secretary to the Post Office.

Read also letter from the Postmaster-General of the instant, stating that Sir Rowland Hill has in consequence of the state of his health been compelled to retire from the public service, and bearing his testimony to the eminent services which Sir Rowland Hill has rendered.

The retirement of Sir Rowland Hill from the office of Secretary

to the Post Office would, if treated under the ordinary machinery of the Superannuation Act, afford to my Lords the power of granting him no more than a pension of £566 13s. 4d., or at the utmost £666 13s. 4d., but it supplies, in the judgment of my Lords, an occasion of peculiar fitness for calling into action the 9th or special clause of the Superannuation Act, and thus, by a proceeding which marks their sense of his services, of drawing to those services the attention of Parliament.

The period during which Sir Rowland Hill has held office, either by a temporary or a permanent appointment, is but little in excess of 20 years ; yet my Lords have to regret that while he remains full as ever of ability, energy, and resources, and of disposition to expend them for the public good, the state of his health, due, without doubt, in great part to his indefatigable labours, compels him to solicit a retirement.

It is not, however, by length of service that the merits and claims of such a man are to be measured. It is not even by any acknowledgment or reward which the Executive Government, in the exercise of the powers confided to it, can confer.

The postal system, one of the most powerful organs which modern civilisation has placed at the command of Government, has, mainly under the auspices and by the agency of Sir Rowland Hill, been, within the last quarter of a century, not merely improved, but transformed. The letters transmitted have increased nearly nine-fold, and have been carried at what may be estimated as little more than one-ninth of the former charge. In numerous respects convenience has been consulted and provided for even more than cheapness.

Upon the machinery for the transmission of letters there have been grafted other schemes, which, at a former period, would justly have been deemed visionary, for the transmission of books with other printed matter, and of money, and for receiving and storing the savings of the people.

While these arduous duties have been undertaken, the condition of the persons employed in this vast department has been improved, and, could attention be adequately drawn to what lies

beneath the surface, my Lords are persuaded that the methods of communication by letter which are now in action have produced for the mass of the population social and moral benefits which might well have thrown even these brilliant results into the shade.

As respects purely fiscal interests, advantages so great as those which have been recited were, of course, not to be obtained without some effort or sacrifice. But the receipts on account of postal service, which on the first adoption of the change were reduced by above a million sterling, have now more than recovered themselves, and if computed on the same basis as under the old system, the gross sum realised is about £3,870,000, instead of £2,346,000, and the net about £1,790,000, in lieu of £1,660,000 ; at the same time, contraband in letters may be stated to have ceased, and instead of a stationary revenue, such as that derived from letters between 1815 and 1835, the State has one which is steadily and even rapidly progressive.

My Lords do not forget that it has been by the powerful agency of the railway system that these results have been rendered practicable. Neither do they enter into the question, as foreign to the occasion, what honour may be due to those who, before the development of the plans of Sir Rowland Hill, urged the adoption of the uniform penny postage.* Nor are they insensible to the fact that the co-operation of many able public servants has been essential to the work performed. But after all justice has been done to others, Sir Rowland Hill is beyond doubt the person to whom it was given to surmount every kind of obstacle, and to bring what had been theretofore matter of speculation into the world of practice, without whom the country would not have enjoyed the boon, or would only have enjoyed it at a later date, and to whom, accordingly, its enjoyment may justly be deemed due.

Nor is it in this country alone that are to be perceived the happy fruits of his labours ; the recognition of his

* For correction of this error, see Sir R. Hill's reply subjoined.

THE POST OFFICE OF FIFTY YEARS AGO.

plans has spread with a rapidity to be accounted for only by their excellence from land to land, and truly may now be said to have met with acceptance throughout the civilised world.

Under these circumstances, it may justly be averred that my Lords are dealing on the present occasion with the case not merely of a meritorious public servant, but of a benefactor of his race; and that his fitting reward is to be found not in this or that amount of pension, but in the grateful recollection of his country.

But my Lords discharge the portion of duty which belongs to them, with cordial satisfaction, in awarding to Sir Rowland Hill, for life, his full salary of £2,000 per annum.

Let a copy of this Minute be laid before Parliament.

Transmit copy to the Postmaster-General, with a request that it may be communicated to Sir Rowland Hill.

Hampstead, 17th March, 1864.

MY LORDS,—The Postmaster-General, as requested by your Lordships, has done me the favour to furnish me with a copy of your Minute of 11th instant, granting me a special superannuation allowance on retiring from my office as Secretary to the Post Office, and conveying to me the very favourable opinion, which your Lordships are pleased to express, of the manner in which I have discharged my duties.

It cannot be necessary to assure your Lordships of the deep gratification with which I have received so handsome and elaborate a recognition of my services. I have only to beg that you will be pleased to accept my most respectful thanks.

In a document so highly complimentary, I hesitate to notice what would appear to be an admission, inadvertently made, to the effect that the adoption of the uniform penny postage was urged by others before the development of my plans. This, I

THE POST OFFICE OF FIFTY YEARS AGO.

assure your Lordships, is an error ; and, as uniformity of rate constitutes the main feature of my plan, I am naturally anxious to place before you the real facts of the case. I trust, therefore, you will pardon me if I request attention to the enclosed memorandum on the subject.

I need scarcely add, that should the expectations of my medical friends, of improved health from rest, be realised, and any occasion arise in which it may appear to your Lordships that my assistance or advice in further postal improvements may be of advantage, I shall feel honoured by being permitted to place them at your disposal.

I have, &c.,

ROWLAND HILL.

*The Right Honourable the Lords Commissioners of
Her Majesty's Treasury, &c. &c. &c.*

MEMORANDUM.

A low and uniform rate of postage forms the most essential feature of my plan of postal reform, and I have no hesitation in stating that its conception originated wholly with myself. To guard against future error, I ask permission to place on record a brief statement of facts.

The principle of uniformity of rate, now that it has been in successful operation for nearly a quarter of a century, appears, perhaps, simple and obvious ; but so far from its having been, as it is sometimes supposed, the happy thought of a moment, it was the result of most laborious investigation on my part. Indeed, a slight consideration will show that its conception necessarily involved a previous discovery, viz., that the cost per letter of mere transit within the limits of the United Kingdom was practically inappreciable, or, at least, that it was not dependent mainly on distance, being, in fact, quite as much dependent on the number of letters contained in the particular mail as on

THE POST OFFICE OF FIFTY YEARS AGO.

the distance that mail was carried. Indeed, it was shown from careful investigation that the cost of mere conveyance, even for so great a distance as from London to Edinburgh, was only the 36th part of a penny per letter. From this and other facts it followed that a uniform rate was more just than one varying according to distance. The convenience of uniformity was obvious.

I may add that when I first entered on the investigations preparatory to the construction of my plan, I myself had no conception of the practicability of a uniform rate; and that the discovery referred to above was as startling to myself, as it proved when announced to the public at large.

A reference to my original pamphlet, a copy of which is, I presume, still in your Lordship's possession, or to my evidence before the Select Committee of 1838, appointed to inquire into the practicability of my plans, will show the various steps by which I arrived at the conclusion that a uniform penny rate was at once just and practicable.

There is but one other person, so far as I am aware, to whom the suggestion of a uniform penny rate has, with even the slightest plausibility, ever been assigned—I refer to the late Mr. Wallace, formerly Member for Greenock, and Chairman of the Select Committee on Postage in 1838; but though Mr. Wallace frequently urged, among other useful reforms, a great reduction in the postal charges, I can say from personal knowledge that he had no idea whatever of a uniform rate until after the publication of my pamphlet. Indeed, this sufficiently appears from his speech in Parliament in July, 1836, the last occasion on which, before the publication of my pamphlet, he referred to the rates of postage. The following is an extract from "Hansard" (vol. 35, 3d series, p. 422) :—

* * * * *

"At the same time the rates of postage ought to be reduced. It would be proper not to charge more than 3*d.* for any letter sent a distance of 50 miles; for 100 miles, 4*d.*; 200 miles, 6*d.* ;

THE POST OFFICE OF FIFTY YEARS AGO.

and the highest rate of postage ought not to be more than 8*d.* or 9*d.* at most."

* * * * *

Further evidence upon this point is also in my possession, which can be submitted, should it be deemed necessary.

ROWLAND HILL.

Hampstead, 17th March, 1864.

In reply to this the Treasury at once assured Sir Rowland Hill that they had had no intention whatever of questioning the originality of his scheme of postal reform.*

[With reference to the above memorandum, it may be useful to state that ever since the Uniform Penny Postage became an admitted success, numerous claimants—generally insane—have come forward from time to time, each asserting that he, and not Sir Rowland Hill, was the real originator of the plan, or of some of its essential features. Similar claims—mostly founded on some hallucination—are constantly forthcoming to every important improvement. No one, however, has yet explained what could have induced all these early postal reformers, without one single exception, to adopt the extraordinary course of carefully destroying every shred of documentary evidence which would have been useful in establishing their claims; not one of them having been able to produce a single published document, containing his supposed-to-be-similar suggestions, which is not

* Life of Sir Rowland Hill and History of Penny Postage, Vol. II., p. 394.

of much later date than Sir Rowland's Hill's pamphlet of February, 1837. Probably these claimants, if they ever really devised anything, never published their ideas; but if that be the case, valuable suggestions never published are worth no more to the public than good advice never given, and any claims founded thereon are too absurd to deserve attention.]

Besides the Treasury minute above quoted, other cordial recognitions of his services were showered upon Sir Rowland Hill on his retirement. Her Majesty had, a short time before, been graciously pleased to confer upon him the dignity of a Knight Commander of the Bath. The Society of Arts, through the hands of the Prince of Wales, presented him with the Albert Gold Medal—the first ever conferred. From Oxford he received the honorary dignity of D.C.L.; from Parliament a grant of £20,000 and full salary as a pension for the remainder of his life.

Birmingham, and, later on, Kidderminster (his native town) and London, erected a statue in his honour. Liverpool and other towns presented him with valuable testimonials of their regard; amongst other such gifts was one to which he attached especial value—viz., a pair of china vases, made by the workmen of the Staffordshire potteries, who, when they knew for whom the vases were intended, had, at their own request, given their labour and skill without any remuneration.

Sir Rowland Hill lived in quiet retirement at

Hampstead more than fifteen years after he had left the Post Office. Just a few months before his death the Corporation of London, on the motion of Mr. Washington Lyon, conferred upon him the Freedom of the City, giving a double grace to the honour by adopting, in consequence of his failing health, the hitherto unprecedented course of dispensing with his personal attendance at Guildhall, and appointing a special deputation to present it to him at his own residence.

Peacefully and painlessly he passed away in his 84th year, on the 27th of August, 1879, and was buried in Westminster Abbey by the side of James Watt; and in concluding this portion of our notice, we can hardly do better than quote the admirable poem in which, turning as he sometimes does from lighter to more serious thoughts, Mr. Punch expressed the feelings of the world at large.

IN MEMORIAM.

Rowland Hill.

ORIGINATOR OF CHEAP POSTAGE.

Born at Kidderninster, Dec. 3rd, 1795. Died at Hampstead, Aug. 27th, 1879.

*Buried in Westminster Abbey, by the side of James Watt,
Thursday, September 4th.*

No question this of worthy's right to lie
With England's worthiest, by the grave of him
Whose brooding brain brought under mastery
The wasted strength of the Steam-giant grim.

THE POST OFFICE OF FIFTY YEARS AGO.

Like labours—his who tamed by sea and land
Power, Space, and Time, to needs of human kind,
That bodies might be stronger, nearer hand,
And his who multiplied mind's links with mind,
Breaking the barriers that, of different height
For rich and poor, were barriers still for all,
Till "out of mind" was one with "out of sight,"
And parted souls oft parted past recall ;
Freeing from tax unwise the interchange
Of distant mind with mind and mart with mart ;
Releasing thought from bars that clipped its range ;
Lightening a load felt most i' the weakest part.
What if the wings he made so strong and wide
Bear burdens with their blessings? Own that all
For which his bold thought we oft hear decried,
Of laden bag, too frequent postman's call,
Is nothing to the threads of love and light
Shot, thanks to him, through life's web dark and wide,
Nor only where he first unsealed men's sight,
But far as pulse of time and flow of tide !
Was it a little thing to think this out ?
Yet none till he had hit upon the thought ;
And, the thought brought to birth, came sneer and flout
Of all his insight saw, his wisdom taught ;
All office-doors were closed against him—hard ;
All office heads were closed against him too.
He had but worked, like others, for reward."
"The thing was all a dream." "It would not do."
But this was not a vaguely dreaming man,
A wind-bag of the known Utopian kind ;
He had thought out, wrought out, in full, his plan ;
'Twas the far-seeing fighting with the blind :

THE POST OFFICE OF FIFTY YEARS AGO.

And the far-seeing won his way, at last,
Though pig-headed Obstruction's force died hard ;
Denied his due, official bitters cast
Into the cup wrung slowly from their guard.

But not until the Country, wiser far
Than those that ruled it, with an angry cry,
Seeing its soldiers 'gainst it waging war,
At last said resolutely, " Stand you by !

" And let him in to do what he has said,
And you do not, and will not let him do."
And so at last the fight he fought was sped,
Thought at less cost freer and farther flew.

And all the world was kindlier closer knit,
And all man's written word can bring to man
Had easier ways of transit made for it,
And none sat silent under poortith's ban

When severed from his own, as in old days.
And this we owe to one sagacious brain,
By one kind heart well-guided, that in ways
Of life laborious sturdy strength had ta'en.

And his reward came, late, but sweeter so,
In the wide sway that his wise thought had won :
He was as one whose seed to tree should grow,
Who hears him blest that sowed it 'gainst the sun.

So love and honour made his grey hairs bright,
And while most things he hoped to fulness came,
And many ills he warred with were set right,
Good work and good life joined to crown his name.

And now that he is dead, we see how great
The good work done, the good life lived how brave,
And through all crosses hold him blest of fate,
Placing this wreath upon his honoured grave !

CONCLUSION.

LATER IMPROVEMENTS.

NOT the least important of the reforms Sir Rowland Hill effected was the transformation of St. Martin's-le-Grand from a sort of official "Sleepy Hollow" into a department taking a just pride in the efficiency of the postal service, and eagerly and constantly seeking to extend its usefulness. The good that men do lives after them, and Sir Rowland Hill's views and principles—once regarded by the Department as "wild, visionary, and absurd"—have long become its fundamental rules, and daily receive practical recognition.

By weeding the office, as far as possible, of the State's "bad bargains;" by steadily encouraging efficiency and zealous service wherever found; by taking care that in all promotions advancement should be regulated solely by superior efficiency, no regard whatever being given to political or private influence, Sir R. Hill succeeded in training up a staff of officers well capable of continuing the great work he had originated.

Since his resignation in 1864, the whole of Europe, Canada, the United States, Egypt, and many other important places, have been included in a Postal Union, throughout which letters may be sent for a uniform rate of $2\frac{1}{2}d.$ per half ounce—a marvellous change in the direction of simplicity and cheapness; and before long we hope India, Australia, and indeed

our whole Colonial Empire, may be enjoying the same great advantage.

Looking nearer home we find that in place of the single daily communication with London, towns like Liverpool, Manchester, and Brighton receive as many as seven such dispatches daily—many other towns receiving four or five—while even to those places, so remote from London, that letters sent could not be delivered the same day (and where, therefore, very frequent dispatches would be useless), two, and in some cases three, mails daily have been established.

Town and suburban deliveries have been greatly increased in frequency and rapidity, and additional facilities are constantly being afforded. In the year ending 31st March, 1886—the latest for which the Postmaster-General's Report has as yet been issued—371 new Post Offices and 860 pillar and wall boxes were established, or, roughly speaking, four new Post Offices of one sort or another were opened every working day throughout that year.

The result of these long-continued improvements—powerfully assisted of course by the extension of the Railway system—has been enormously to increase the amount of correspondence.

The $76\frac{1}{2}$ millions of chargeable letters delivered in the United Kingdom under the old system in 1839, had expanded in the year 1885-6 to a gross total, including post-cards, of nearly 1,575 millions, or more than twenty-fold the former number.

In place of $44\frac{1}{2}$ millions of newspapers transmitted

by post, as in 1839, the annual number is now more than $147\frac{1}{2}$ millions, and if we add to these the 342 millions of Book-packets and circulars, and the $26\frac{1}{2}$ millions of articles sent last year by Parcel Post, the total number of missives transmitted through the Post Office annually for delivery in the United Kingdom (exclusive therefore of outward Foreign and Colonial mails) reaches the goodly total of more than 2,091 millions.

The gross revenue is now fourfold, and the net revenue double its former amount—pretty fair results from a plan no portion of which could, in the opinion of the old postal officials, be adopted with advantage either to the public or to the revenue!

Among other great improvements in the Post Office, the establishment of Post Office Savings Banks, originally proposed by Sir Charles W. Sykes, manager of the Huddersfield Banking Company, the cheapening of the telegraph service, and the establishment of the Parcel Post are too obvious to need more than a passing allusion, though they furnish abundant evidence of the sturdy growth and strong vitality of that beneficent measure of "Post Office Reform" of which, just fifty years ago, the "importance and practicability" were first made manifest.

The contrast between the old and new postal systems in all matters affecting social intercourse, has perhaps never been placed in a more striking light

than in the following letter from Miss Harriet Martineau to Sir Thomas Wilde, M.P. (afterwards Lord Truro), who, at the time it was written, was drawing the attention of Parliament to the difficulties which official jealousy was placing in the way of Postal Reform. This letter gives a vivid picture of the happiness which the Penny Postage system, even in its then imperfect state, had conferred almost at a burst upon the public, and especially upon the poorer classes.

THE BENEFITS OF PENNY POSTAGE.

LETTER FROM MISS HARRIET MARTINEAU TO SIR THOMAS WILDE, M.P.

Tynemouth, 15th May, 1843.

SIR,—While testimonies to the effect of Post Office reform on the interests of Commerce, Science, Literature, &c., abound, the merits of this reform seem to me to be still left half untold.

The benefits it confers on social and domestic interests exceed, in my opinion, the whole sum of the rest. We hear less of this class of results than of others—partly because they are of a delicate nature, involving feelings which individuals shrink from laying open, and partly because they are so universal (where the privilege of cheap postage extends), that it seems to be no one's especial business to declare them; but there can be no doubt that this class of blessings is felt with a keenness and a depth of gratitude which, if they could only find expression, would overwhelm the author of this reform with a sense of the magnitude of his own work.

The first mournful event in the life of a happy family of the middle and lower classes—the family dispersion—is softened, has, indeed, assumed a new aspect within the last four years. When the sons go forth into the world to prepare themselves for a

THE POST OFFICE OF FIFTY YEARS AGO.

vocation, or to assume it, the parting from parents and sisters is no longer what it was, from *the sense of separation* being so much lessened. Formerly, the monthly or fortnightly letter—a stated expense, to be incurred only with regularity, and the communication itself confined to a single sheet—had nothing of the familiarity of correspondence. At present, when on any occasion, on the slightest prompting of inclination, the youth can pour out his mind to his best friends—no sudden check upon family confidence being imposed, and no barrier becoming gradually erected by infrequency of intercourse—the moral dangers of a young man's entrance upon life are incalculably lessened.

In the preservation of access to parents and home, many thousands of young men are provided with a safeguard, for want of which many thousands formerly became aliens from family interests, and thereby outcasts from the innocence and confidence of home.

The State has the closest interest in the rectitude and purity of its rising citizens, and therefore the public gratitude is due to a measure which promotes them; but when it is considered that the general sense of access to home which young men now carry abroad puts new valour into the heart of the brave—new reliance into that of the timid—that it encourages the enterprising, rouses the indolent, and, in short, brings all the best influences of the old life to bear upon the new, it is clear that the State must be better served in proportion to the improved power and comfort of its rising race of men.

Not less certain is the benefit to the daughters of the industrious classes. If the governesses of this country (in whose hands rest much of the moral destiny of another generation) could speak of the influence of this reform upon their lot, what should we not hear of the blessing of access to home? We should hear of parents' advice and sympathy obtained when needed most; of a daily sense of support from the scarcely ideal presence of mother or brother; of nights of sleep obtained by the disburdening of cares; of relief from the worst experience of poverty (however small the actual means may be) while expense is no longer the irritating hindrance of speech, the infliction which makes the listening parent deaf, and the full-hearted daughter dumb. When we look somewhat lower, and regard the classes which furnish hundreds of thousands of workwomen, of dressmakers, of shop-

women, and domestic servants, the benefits of this access to home become clearly inestimable. Society seems to be awakening to a sense of the hardship of ill-requited labour—of the extreme scantiness of the recompense of the toil of women especially. However grievous the hardship may be, the case was worse when the solitary worker felt her affections crushed—felt as if forsaken under an enforced family silence. Far more important is the opening of the Post Office to hundreds and thousands of these industrious workers than an increase of earnings would be ; for the restoration of access to home, which might then be an expensive indulgence, is now a matter of course for all ; a benefit enjoyed without hesitation or remorse. Now while they can spare a few pence from the supply of their urgent wants, they can retain their place in affection and self-respect beside the family hearth, and who shall say to how many this privilege has been equivalent to peace of mind—in how many cases to the preservation of innocence and a good name ?

Then, again, how many are the sick-rooms of this country, and how many of the active members of society are interested in each sick-room ? Among the richer classes, if any member of a family is ill, the rest can come together and await the event. Not so in the wide-spreading working classes. There, whatever may be their anxieties, families must remain asunder. For the most part the absent members were, till lately, obliged to be patient under a weekly bulletin, or if more frequent accounts were indulged in, the expense was a heavy aggravation of the cost of illness, and was indeed in large families out of the question. Look at the difference now ! How much more allowable is a daily bulletin now than a weekly one was then ; and though the sick are few in comparison with the numbers who have an interest in them, they are numerous enough, particularly if we include the aged and infirm, to deserve consideration for themselves. Who can imagine the importance of the post hour, in these days, to the sick and suffering ? Who does not know that to a multitude of these sufferers post time is the brightest season of the day ? Indeed, an entirely new alleviation, a most salutary source of cheerfulness, has been let into the sick-room by the new Post Office arrangement. It would be a blessing if only a few sufferers were enriched with a flow of family and friendly correspondence, not only of letters but of drawings, books, music, flowers, seeds,

THE POST OFFICE OF FIFTY YEARS AGO.

and bouquets—of all the little gifts that the Post Office can convey. It would be agreeable that a small adornment of such graces should accompany the grand utilities of the system, but when it is considered to what an extent this benefit spreads, that not a day of any year passes that a multitude of sick and infirm are not thus cheered, these humanities and graces command a gratitude seldom due on so large a scale.

Then, again, there is a diffusion of the advantages gained by one member of a family or society, so that the recompense of one person's talents or merits becomes a benefit to many. If one member of a family attains a position in literature, or any other pursuit which gives him a command of information or other interests, he needs no longer to confine it to himself for want of means to communicate the luxury. The infirm father, the blind mother, whose pleasures are becoming fewer and fewer, may now not only enjoy the fame of an eminent son and daughter as a matter of complacency, but may share that portion of the results which consists in correspondence.

Instead of the weekly letter of one single sheet, there comes now a frequent packet, enclosing letters from all parts of the world—tidings on a host of subjects of interest, political, scientific, or literary—a wealth of ideas to occupy the weary mind, and of pleasures wherewith to refresh the sleepless affections. As for the advantages of a more business-like character arising from the present facilities for the transmission of family letters and papers, they are so great as to defy description, and so obvious as not to need it.

Some persons seem to think all these considerations of too private and delicate a character to be openly connected with any fiscal arrangement. The more unusual such a connexion the more carefully, in my opinion, should it be exhibited. The more infrequent the occasions when a Government can, by its fiscal arrangements, directly promote the social and domestic virtue and happiness of a whole people, and engage its gratitude and affection, the more eagerly should such occasions be embraced. The present is such a one as, I imagine, has never before presented itself in the history of legislation. The best that one can ordinarily say in regard to revenue arrangements is that they produce the smallest practicable amount of evil, and that that amount of evil ought to be cheerfully borne for the sake of the indispensable object.

THE POST OFFICE OF FIFTY YEARS AGO.

Very different is the case of the new postage. By the same means which are yearly augmenting the revenue, there is a strengthening of social and domestic charities. The same arrangements which carry more money into the Treasury, which stimulate commerce and encourage science and literature, serve to expand the influences of home, and to repeal for the dispersed the sentence of banishment from the best influences of life. From this strong and honourable peculiarity our new Post Office system will, I imagine, take rank in history above all fiscal arrangements of any former time.

It will stand alone as being not only tolerated and obeyed, but as having won for Government a gratitude and attachment such as no other single measure could win, and such as will deepen with every passing year. My own belief is that at this moment such grateful attachment is already a set-off against a large measure of disaffection, partial and imperfect as is, as yet, the working of the system.

As regards the author of the penny postage system, I know, of my own knowledge, that a multitude of persons are, like myself, really oppressed by the sense of obligation as yet almost unacknowledged and wholly unrequited. The personal obligations of every one of us are heavy, but when we think of the amount of blessing he has conferred on the morals and affections of a whole people, of the number of innocent persons and sufferers cheered by the knowledge spread abroad and human happiness promoted by his single hand, we are led to question whether any one member of society ever before discharged so much of the functions at once of the pulpit, the press, the parent, the physician, and the ruler—ever in so short a time benefited his nation so vastly, or secured so unlimited a boon to the subjects of an empire; and when other nations shall have adopted his reforms, there may be an extension even of this praise.

I am, Sir, yours respectfully,

HARRIET MARTINEAU.

Sir Thomas Wilde, M.P.

We now place a facsimile of Sir Rowland Hill's pamphlet in our readers' hands.

POST OFFICE REFORM;

ITS

IMPORTANCE

AND

PRACTICABILITY.

BY ROWLAND HILL.

"The facility of frequent, punctual, and quick communication, which the institution of the Post Office was calculated to secure, may be justly classed among the elements of profitable commerce. It is essential to the purposes of government, and subservient to all the ends of national policy."
Eighteenth Report of the Commissioners of Revenue Inquiry, 1829.

"The principle of the Post Office at its establishment, as is distinctly laid down in the 12th Charles II., was to afford advantage to trade and commerce. The direct revenue to be derived from the Post Office was not the primary consideration."
Report on the Post Office by Lord Louther.

"We have sufficiently informed ourselves on this subject to be satisfied that an alteration in the present system is absolutely necessary."
Fourth Report on the Post Office, by the present Commissioners of Inquiry.

LONDON:

PUBLISHED BY CHARLES KNIGHT AND CO.,
22, LUDGATE STREET.

1837.

P R E F A C E.

A SMALL edition of this little pamphlet was printed, and privately circulated, early in the month of January. It is unnecessary to trouble the reader with the reasons for adopting this course, but I may remark, that it has been productive of one important advantage,—it has enabled me to submit my plans to the consideration of many able men, who, either from attention to the particular subject, from skill in organization, or from extensive commercial knowledge, are eminently qualified to judge of the practicability of the measures proposed. Their examination has led to some important improvements, which, while they remove certain difficulties that attached to the plan in its original form, tend still further to simplify the proposed mechanism. These modifications are given in the present edition.

Doubts as to the well working of certain parts of the plan, even in its present form, have certainly been expressed by some whose opinion I esteem very highly; such parts have consequently undergone a laborious and anxious re-examination; and

have, in the present edition, been treated more fully than in the former. Knowing that I alone am responsible for the practicability of the plans which I have suggested, I should have considered it my duty to reject every alteration, by whomsoever recommended, the reasons for which did not satisfy my own mind. Fortunately, however, in each instance in which I have not been convinced by the arguments in favour of a proposed modification of the plan, my own opinion has been confirmed by a majority of those who have kindly interested themselves in the matter.

The cordial reception which the plan, as a whole, has hitherto met with, has tended to confirm my conviction of its practicability and importance; and it is now submitted to the more severe ordeal of public opinion, in the confident hope that it will receive that candid, though searching, examination which should ever attend the pursuit of truth. Such an examination I respectfully invite from the public press; well knowing that however it may affect the plan here put forth, it cannot but greatly promote the object I have in view, which is not to establish the merits of any peculiar system of management, but to lead to the adoption of the best system, whatever that may be, and thus to render the Post Office efficient in the highest degree.

Fortunately this is not a party question. Whether

considered in reference to the remission of taxation, to the extension of commerce, the promotion of friendly intercourse, or the advancement of education, it is interesting to all.

An objection to the proposed plan, which has reached me from an unknown quarter, is too remarkable to be passed over without notice: it is, that the number of letters under the proposed arrangements would be increased so enormously as to render their distribution impossible.

I have reckoned upon a great augmentation of the Post Office business, as affording the means for lowering the rate of postage and increasing the facilities for the transmission of letters. The objector so far outruns my expectations as to convert that which I consider a matter of gratulation into a subject for apprehension.

It seems to me that the Post Office must necessarily be considered as in a defective state, unless it is capable of distributing all the letters which the people of the country can have any motive for writing; at least in ordinary seasons, and under ordinary circumstances; therefore, if at any time the means employed by the Post Office prove insufficient, they should be forthwith increased.

If the objector can be supposed to mean that the

PREFACE.

number of letters will probably become so great that no practicable increase of the Post Office establishment will be sufficient for their distribution, I may remark upon so extraordinary a supposition, that I never yet heard of a merchant, a manufacturer, or a trader, possessed of sufficient capital and other adequate means, being frightened lest his business should become too large. To go a step further, how ridiculous would it seem should a joint-stock company, with ample capital, an able direction, and active and intelligent agents, decline the undertaking they had proposed to themselves, upon discovering that they must expect an unprecedented demand for the objects of their operations.

With national resources, the transaction of any conceivable amount of Post Office business must be easy; and let it not be forgotten, that under able direction, the more extensive the business, the more systematically it may be conducted, and, consequently, with greater effect, economy, and facility.

The nation can always command the services of men of first rate ability; let that be done, and then we may safely rest assured that all visionary obstacles will at once disappear, and that real difficulties will be vigorously grappled with, and in time overcome.

However, it is always well to have a *dernier ressort*. If, unluckily, an epidemical passion for

letter writing should rage to such a degree as to overpower all ordinary and extraordinary means of control, even let the pent up spirit lift the safety valve and expand itself in freedom. Or, in more staid language, no longer confine the public to the use of the Post Office, but allow letter writers to choose a mode of transmission for themselves.

2, *Burton Crescent*,
Feb. 22, 1837.

POST OFFICE REFORM.

THE last quarterly accounts show that the present revenue of the country greatly exceeds the expenditure; there is therefore reason to hope that a reduction of taxation may shortly take place.

In the reductions which have heretofore been made, the gain to the public and the loss to the revenue have varied greatly in relation to each other. Thus in the repeal of the house duty, the gain to the public and the loss to the revenue were practically equal; while the remission of one-half of the duties on soap and leather eventually diminished the productiveness of each tax by about one-third only; a reduction of about 28 per cent. in the malt tax has lessened the produce of that tax by only two or three per cent.; and in the instance of coffee, a reduction in the duty of 50 per cent. has actually been accompanied by an increase of more than 50 per cent. in its produce.

These facts show that when a reduction of taxation is about to take place, it is exceedingly important that great care and judgment should be exercised in the selection of the tax to be reduced, in order that the maximum of relief may be afforded to the public, with the minimum of injury to the revenue.

The best test to apply to the several existing taxes for the discovery of the one which may be reduced most extensively, with the least proportionate loss to the revenue, is probably this: excluding from the examination those taxes, the produce of which is greatly affected by changes in the habits of the people, as the taxes on spirits, tobacco, and hair-powder, let each be examined as to whether its productiveness has kept pace with the increasing numbers and prosperity of the nation. And that tax which proves most defective under this test is, in all probability, the one we are in quest of.

If this test be applied to the principal branches of the revenue, it will be found that the tax on the transmission of letters is the most remarkable for its non-increasing productiveness. A mere glance at the following table must satisfy every one that there is something extremely wrong in this tax as it now stands.

TABLE showing the Net Revenue actually obtained from the Post Office, for every fifth Year, from 1815 to 1835 inclusive; also the Revenue which would have been obtained, had the Receipts kept pace with the Increase of Population, (the Rate of which increase, since 1831, is assumed to be the same as from 1821 to 1831.)

Year.	Population.	Net revenue actually obtained.	Revenue which would have been obtained had the receipts kept pace with the increase of population from 1815.	Comparative loss.
		£	£	£
1815	19,552,000	1,557,291	1,557,291	.....
1820	20,928,000	1,479,547	1,674,000	194,453
1825	22,362,000	1,670,219	1,789,000	118,781
1830	23,961,000	1,517,952	1,917,000	399,048
1835	25,605,000	1,540,300	2,048,000	507,700

It appears, then, that during the last twenty years, the absolute revenue derived from the Post Office has slightly diminished; whereas, if it had kept pace with the growth of population, there would have been an increase of £507,700 per annum. As compared with the population, then, the Post Office revenue has fallen off to the extent of more than half a million per annum; but if the extension of education, and the increasing trade and prosperity of the country, during this period, be taken into account, there can be no doubt that the real deficit is even much greater.

The extent of this loss will probably be best estimated by comparing the Post Office revenue with that actually derived from some tax which, while less exorbitant, is in other respects liable to

nearly as possible the same influences. The tax upon stage coaches obviously falls under these conditions.

Allowing the great increase in steam navigation * as a set-off against the slight diminution in the duty on post-horses, which might be considered as impairing the correctness of this comparison, let us proceed to the consideration of the following table, which shows the net produce of the stage-coach duty for every fifth year, from 1815 to 1835 inclusive; together with the net revenue actually derived from the Post Office during the same time; as also the amount which would have been obtained had the receipts increased at the same rate as the produce of the stage coach duty.

STAGE COACH DUTIES.			POST OFFICE REVENUE.		
Year.	Net Revenue produced by the Stage Coach Duty.	Rate per cent. of the increase as compared with the year 1815.	Net Revenue actually obtained from the Post Office.	Revenue which would have been obtained had the receipts of the Post Office increased at the same rate as the produce of the Stage Coach Duty.	Comparative loss.
	£		£	£	
1815	217,671	..... ..	1,557,291	1,557,291	..... ..
1820	273,477	25	1,479,547	1,946,000	466,453
1825	362,631	66	1,670,219	2,585,000	914,781
1830	418,598	92	1,517,952	2,990,000	1,472,048
1835	498,497	128	1,540,300	3,550,000	2,009,700

* In the evidence before the Parliamentary Committee on the Blackwall Railroad, it is shown, that the number of persons who, in the year 1835, traversed the whole distance between London and Blackwall by means of Steam-boats was upwards of one million. Had the limit been placed as high as Greenwich, the multitudes constantly passing between that place and London would have vastly augmented the number.

If it be granted, then, that the demand for the conveyance of letters has increased during the last twenty years, in the same ratio as that for the conveyance of persons and parcels, which can scarcely be doubted, it follows inevitably that, for some cause or other, there is, in effect, a loss in the Post Office revenue of £2,000,000 per annum.

In support of this view of the case it may be stated, that, in France, where the rates of postage are less exorbitant than with us, the gross receipts are said to have increased from nearly 24,000,000 francs (£960,000) in 1821, to 37,000,000 francs (£1,480,000) in 1835, or fifty-four per cent., in fourteen years. The increase of the net receipts of our own Post Office, which it is assumed above ought to have taken place, within the same period, is seventy-one per cent.; but this difference is more than justified by the superior increase in population and commerce in this country, as compared with France. Besides, the high probability is, that the *net* revenue in France would be found to have increased more rapidly than the *gross* revenue. These considerations would lead us to infer, that the effective loss to the Post Office revenue, resulting from some cause or other, is even more than two millions per annum.

The unsatisfactory state of our Post Office revenue is thus referred to by Sir Henry Parnell: "The revenue of the Post Office has been stationary, at about £1,400,000 a year, since 1818. This can be

accounted for only by the great duty charged on letters; for with a lower duty the correspondence of the country through the Post Office would have increased in proportion to the increase of population and national wealth.”*

On this subject Mr. M'Culloch says: “ We believe, however, that these (the additions made to the rates of postage) have been completely overdone, and considering the vast importance of a cheap and safe conveyance of letters to commerce, it will immediately be seen that this is a subject deserving of grave consideration. In point of fact, the Post Office revenue has been about stationary since 1814, though, from the increase of population and commerce in the intervening period, it is pretty obvious that had the rates of postage not been so high as to force recourse to other channels, the revenue must have been decidedly greater now than at the end of the war. Were the rates moderate, the greater dispatch and security of the Post Office conveyance would hinder any considerable number of letters from being sent through other channels. But in the estimation of very many persons, the present duties more than countervail these advantages, and the number of coaches that now pass between all parts of the country, and the facility with which the law may be evaded by transmitting letters in parcels conveyed by them, renders the imposition of oppressive rates

* Financial Reform, fourth ed., p. 41.

of postage quite as injurious to the revenue as to individuals." *

There cannot, I conceive, be a doubt that the main cause of the remarkable state of the Post Office revenue, is that which Sir Henry Parnell and Mr. M'Culloch point out. Consequently, that even supposing the tax on the transmission of letters to be regulated with a total disregard to the convenience of the public, but merely with a view of rendering it as productive in immediate revenue as possible, it is at present decidedly too high.

The net revenue derived from the Post Office is rather more than twice the whole cost of management; from which it may appear that the tax is about 200 per cent. on the natural or untaxed cost of postage. Such a tax, enormous as it would be, is however far below that really levied,—for it must be borne in mind that the cost of management includes the cost of collecting the tax, and that of conveying the newspapers and franked letters. Hereafter an attempt will be made to ascertain the natural cost of postage with some degree of precision. In the mean time it may be remarked, that even if the whole expense of the Post Office be considered as the natural cost of conveying the letters and newspapers, and a due proportion (say one-third) of that expense be placed to the account of newspapers and franked letters, the tax on the transmission of

* M'Culloch's Commercial Dictionary, p. 935.

letters would be, on an average, upwards of 300 per cent. on the natural cost of such transmission, a rate of taxation which all experience shows to be highly impolitic.

It is not necessary to follow out the subject in all its ramifications, otherwise there would be no difficulty in showing that any obstacle to the free circulation of letters, prospectuses, prices current, &c., must operate injuriously upon many other branches of the revenue.

The loss to the revenue is, however, far from being the most serious of the injuries inflicted on society by the high rates of postage. When it is considered how much the religious, moral, and intellectual progress of the people, would be accelerated by the unobstructed circulation of letters and of the many cheap and excellent non-political publications of the present day, the Post Office assumes the new and important character of a powerful engine of civilization; capable of performing a distinguished part in the great work of National education, but rendered feeble and inefficient by erroneous financial arrangements.

Connected with this view of the subject is a consideration too important to be overlooked. There cannot be a doubt that if the law did not interpose its prohibition, the transmission of letters would be gladly undertaken by capitalists, and conducted on the ordinary commercial principles, with all that economy, attention to the wants of their customers, and skilful adaptation of means to the desired end,

which is usually practised by those whose interests are involved in their success. But the law constitutes the Post Office a monopoly. Its conductors are, therefore, uninfluenced by the ordinary motives to enterprize and good management; and however injudiciously the institution may be conducted, however inadequate it may be to the growing wants of the nation, the people must submit to the inconvenience; they cannot set up a Post Office for themselves. The legislature, therefore, is clearly responsible for all the mischief which may result from the present arrangement. With reference to this point, the Commissioners of Revenue Inquiry, in their able Report on the Post Office, remark, that "the restrictions which, for the maintenance of the revenue, the law has imposed concerning the untaxed conveyance of letters, raise an obligation on the part of the Crown to make adequate provision for the public exigencies in this respect; and, in effecting this object, it falls within the province and the duty of His Majesty's Post-master General to create, as well as to guard and to collect a revenue."*

It would be very easy to multiply arguments against the present condition of this tax. I might speak of the gross inequality of its pressure, of the impossibility of preventing evasion, now notoriously practised by all classes, notwithstanding the inquisitorial means resorted to for the detection of offenders, and the severity of the penalties inflicted. But surely

* 18th Report of the Commissioners of Revenue Inquiry, p. 4.

enough has been said to demonstrate the mischievous tendency of this tax, and the urgent necessity for its extensive modification.

If it be conceded that the tax on the transmission of letters is the one most in need of reduction, the next consideration is, What is the greatest extent, under the present circumstances of the revenue of the country, to which reduction may be safely carried ?

It has, I conceive, been satisfactorily shown that reduction in postage to a considerable extent would produce an increase of revenue. A second reduction would therefore be required to bring back the revenue to its present amount ; and still a third reduction to bring it within the proposed limits.

It would be useless to attempt to ascertain the measure of each of these steps in the reduction of the rates of postage, which, indeed, are only stated with the view of showing that a very extensive reduction in the whole will be required to effect any important diminution in the amount of revenue.

In order to ascertain with as much accuracy as the circumstances of the case admit, the extent to which the rates of postage may be reduced, under the condition of a given reduction in the revenue, the best course appears to be, first to determine as nearly as possible the natural cost of conveying a letter under the varying circumstances of distance, &c. ; that is to say, the cost which would be incurred if the Post Office were conducted on the ordinary

commercial principles, and postage relieved entirely from taxation; and then to add to the natural cost such amount of duty as may be necessary for producing the required revenue.

As a step towards determining the natural cost, let the present actual cost be first ascertained.

Without desiring to interfere with the franking privilege, or to relieve the Post Office of the cost of transmitting newspapers, we must, in order to obtain an accurate result, consider (for the present) a due share of the expenses of the Post Office, as charged to the account of franked letters and newspapers.

The number of letters chargeable with postage which pass through all the post-offices of the United Kingdom per annum is about*	88,600,000
The number of franked letters*	7,400,000
The number of newspapers*	30,000,000
	<hr/>
Total number of letters and newspapers per ann.	126,000,000
	<hr/>
The annual expenses of all kinds at present are†	£696,569

* The total number of letters, &c., transmitted through the Post is a statistical fact altogether unknown: the statement here given is the result of an estimate, which, however, may be relied upon as sufficiently accurate for the present purpose. (Vide Appendix, pp. 77—80.)

† Finance Accounts for the year 1835, pp. 55—57. The great increase in the number of newspapers since the reduction of the duty (already about one-fourth) must be expected in some degree to increase the expenses of the Post Office; the increase cannot, however, be such as materially to affect this calculation.

Consequently, the average cost of conveying a letter or newspaper, including the cost of collecting the tax, is, under the present arrangements, about $1\frac{1}{3}$ d.

In the total of expenses here given some are however included which ought not to enter into the calculation;—certain expenses, as the cost of the packet service, for instance, are undoubtedly capable of great reduction: others, as the cost of expresses, and of many by-posts, are met by special charges.

For the sake of simplicity, it will be well to confine the attention to the *apparent* cost under the existing arrangements of what may be called the *Primary distribution of letters, &c.*, (meaning by that term, the transmission of letters, &c., from post-town to post-town throughout the United Kingdom, and the delivery within the post-towns,) and to leave out of consideration, for the present, the cost of *Secondary distribution*, or that distribution which proceeds from each post-town, as a centre, to places of inferior importance. At the same time, in estimating the cost of primary distribution, it will be convenient to make any reductions which are obviously practicable, and which do not require a deviation in principle from the existing arrangements.

The following table exhibits the apparent cost of primary distribution, cleared of certain extraneous charges, and divided under two heads; the first showing the expenses of transit, or those which are dependent on the distance over which the letters have to be conveyed; the second showing the expenses of

the receipt and delivery of letters, or those which are independent of distance: the cost of collecting the tax is of course included under the latter head.

It will be observed that the Post Office is burthened with a charge of £30,000 per ann. for superannuation allowances, allowances for offices and fees abolished, &c. This heavy charge of course greatly increases the apparent cost of management. The first part of this table, as far as column B, inclusive, is taken from the Finance Accounts for 1835, pp. 55—57; the remainder is the result of estimate.

PRIMARY DISTRIBUTION.					
B	C	D	E	F	Apparant cost of the receipt and delivery of letters, or expenses which are independent of the distance the letters have to be conveyed (cost of collecting the tax included).
<p><i>Salaries and Allowances.</i></p> <p>Salaries to the Post-master General, Officers, and Clerks, in the London, Edinburgh, and Dublin Offices, and wages and allowances to Letter-Carriers, Messengers, &c.</p> <p>Salaries and Allowances to Deputy Post-masters and Agents in Great Britain, Ireland, and the Colonies....</p> <p>Salaries and Wages to Officers and Letter-Carriers in the Twopenny Post Office</p> <p>Allowance for Special Services and Travelling Charges</p> <p>9,039</p> <p>244,510</p>	<p>£</p> <p>89,253</p> <p>20,000^a</p> <p>2,000^b</p> <p>22,000</p> <p>1,000^c</p>	<p>£</p> <p>89,253</p> <p>94,576</p> <p>38,681</p> <p>222,510</p> <p>8,039</p>	<p>£</p> <p>.. .</p> <p>.. .</p> <p>.. .</p> <p>.. .</p> <p>.. .</p>	<p>£</p> <p>89,253</p> <p>94,576</p> <p>38,681</p> <p>222,510</p> <p>8,039</p>	<p>89,253</p> <p>94,576</p> <p>38,681</p> <p>222,510</p> <p>8,039</p>
<p><i>Conveyance of Mails, Transit Charges, and Payments for Ship Letters.</i></p> <p>Riding Work and Expresses by the Deputy Post-masters in Great Britain and Ireland</p> <p>Mileage to Mail Coaches, Wages to Mail Guards and other Mail Coach expenses</p> <p>Tolls paid on Mail Coaches.....</p> <p>Riding Work, and Conveyance of Mails in Canada, Nova Scotia, and Jamaica</p> <p>Riding Work of the Twopenny Post Office</p> <p>Transit Postage through Foreign Countries</p> <p>96,341</p> <p>101,503</p> <p>28,076</p> <p>12,672</p> <p>4,219</p> <p>9,160</p>	<p>80,000^d</p> <p>11,720^e</p> <p>.. .</p> <p>12,672</p> <p>2,500^f</p> <p>9,160</p>	<p>16,341</p> <p>89,783</p> <p>28,076</p> <p>1,719</p>	<p>16,341</p> <p>89,783</p> <p>28,076</p> <p>1,719</p>	<p>16,341</p> <p>89,783</p> <p>28,076</p> <p>1,719</p>	<p>16,341</p> <p>89,783</p> <p>28,076</p> <p>1,719</p>

Ship Letter Payments.....	8,568	124,620	135,919	135,919
Packet Service, Expenses of, including Port Dues.....	260,539 109,987		Between Great Bri- tain and Ireland. } 4,987 }	4,987
<i>Tradesman's Bills, Building, and Repairs.</i>		105,000 ^g		
Building and Repairs	404			
Coals, Candles, Oil, Gas, and Soap	4,827			
Other Bills.....	4,743			
Rents of Offices, Tithes, and Taxes	9,974		9,974	9,974
Law Charges	4,085		4,085	4,085
Stationery, Printing, and Postage.	6,913	1,000 ^e	5,913	1,000
Stationery, Printing, and Advertising....	2,748			
Postage	791			
Superannuation Allowances, for offices } and fees abolished, &c.	3,539 30,248		3,539 30,248	2,539 30,248
<i>Parliamentary Grants.</i>				
To His Grace the Duke of Marlborough..	4,125			
To His Grace the Duke of Grafton.....	3,407			
To the heirs of His Grace the Duke of } Schomberg	2,900	10,432 ^h		
<i>Money paid into the Exchequer on account of the Commissioners for repairing roads between London and Holyhead.</i>				
By Act 59 Geo. III. c. 48; Menai bridge	6,420			
By Act 1 and 2 Geo. IV. c. 35; Conway bridge	883			
	7,303	6,000 ^h	Tolls, say 1,303	1,303
	£696,569	£270,052	£426,517	£144,209
				£282,308

^e Saving effected by the new contract for mail-coaches, which as yet does not extend to Ireland. (Parl. Return, 1836, No. 49).

^f Saved by employing the stage-coaches.

^g The present receipts for passage money, &c., amount to £52,000. £53,600 is the estimated cost of the foreign and colonial packets, and the saving which would result from the abolition of the packet service.

^h This, it would appear, should be charged on the general revenue of the country.

^a Salaries in the colonies and expenses of secondary distribution in the British Isles.

^b Some parts of the district to which the Threepenny Post extends belong properly to the secondary distribution.

^c Charged to secondary distribution.

^d Charged to secondary distribution, and for expresses.

Taking the number of letters and newspapers to be 126,000,000 (see p. 11), the average apparent cost of the primary distribution of newspapers, letters, &c., within the United Kingdom, is for each 84 hundredths of a penny.

Of which the expense of transit is one-third, or 28 hundredths of a penny.

And the cost of receipt, delivery, &c., two-thirds, or 56 hundredths of a penny.

But it must be recollected that the cost of transit for a given distance will, under ordinary circumstances, be in tolerably direct proportion to the weight carried; and as a newspaper or franked letter weighs on an average as much as several ordinary letters, the average expense of transit for a letter chargeable with postage, is probably about one-third of the amount above stated, or nine-hundredths of a penny.*

The smallness of the expense of transit, as here stated, will probably excite some surprise; the following calculation, however, which is founded on more exact data, and is therefore more trustworthy, shows that the expense of transit upon the great mass of letters, small as it appears to be, is probably loaded with charges not strictly appertaining to it, or is greatly enhanced by the carriage of the mail to places which are not of sufficient importance to repay the expense. Whatever may be the cause of the discrepancy between the two calculations, the account of the Post Office expenditure is not published in sufficient detail to enable me to assign it with certainty.

* The chargeable letters do not *weigh* more than about one-fourth of the whole mail.

Estimate of the cost of conveying a Letter from London to Edinburgh, a distance of 400 miles.

MILEAGE ON THE WHOLE MAIL.*	£	s.	d.
From London to York, 196 miles, at $1\frac{9}{16}d.$			
per mile	1	5	$6\frac{1}{4}$
From York to Edinburgh, 204 miles, at $1\frac{1}{2}d.$			
per mile	1	5	0
		2	10
			$6\frac{1}{4}$
GUARDS' WAGES.—Say six Guards, one day each, at 10s. 6d. per week.†	0	10	6
Allow for Tolls (which are paid in Scotland,) and all other expenses.‡	1	18	$11\frac{3}{4}$
		5	0
			0
Total cost of conveying the Mail once from London to Edinburgh, including the Mails of all intermediate places			
The average weight of the mail conveyed by the Londôn and Edinburgh mail coach is about	8	cwt.	
Deduct for the weight of the bags, say	2		
Average weight of letters, newspapers, &c.	6		
The cost of conveyance is therefore per cwt.	16s. 8d.		
Per ounce and a half, the average weight of a newspaper, about one-sixth of a penny.			
Per quarter of an ounce, the average weight of a single letter, about one thirty-sixth of a penny.			

* Parliamentary Return, 1836, No. 364.

† Parliamentary Return, 1835, No. 442.

‡ In strict fairness the English tolls ought perhaps to be included, as the exemption may be considered part of the price paid by the public for the conveyance of the mail. On the other hand, at least part of the coach duty, which for the mails is two-pence for every mile travelled, should be deducted from the estimate. Sir Henry Parnell is of opinion that exemption from this duty would, under good management, be a compensation in full

If any doubt is entertained of the accuracy of this result it may be tested thus:—Suppose one thousand letters to be made up into a parcel and dispatched from London to Edinburgh by coach: at the estimate above given, the weight of the parcel would be about 16 lbs., and the charge for its carriage about 2s. 4½d.; a rate of charge which, upon a contract for nearly half a ton per day, will furnish an adequate remuneration to the coach-master.

It appears, then, that the cost of mere transit incurred upon a letter sent from London to Edinburgh, a distance of 400 miles, is not more than *one thirty-sixth part of a penny*. If therefore the proper charge (exclusive of tax) upon a letter received and delivered in London itself were two-pence, then the proper charge (exclusive of tax) upon a letter received in London, but delivered in Edinburgh, would be two-pence *plus* one-thirty-sixth part of a penny. Now, as the letters taken from London to Edinburgh are undoubtedly carried much more than an average distance, it follows, that when the charge for the receipt and delivery of the letter is determined, as to the coach proprietors for the conveyance of the mail. He says: ‘Without going into particulars, and attempting to prove what is the right course that ought to be taken, I should say generally, that there would be no difficulty, with a proper plan of management, to have the mail coaches horsed by allowing the stamp duty only—without an exemption from paying tolls—that is 4d. a [double] mile—provided that the proprietors were allowed to carry an additional outside passenger, which would be equal to 3d., and that coaches of the best possible construction were used.’—7th Report of Com. of Post Office Inquiry, p. 98.

additional charge of one thirty-sixth part of a penny would amply repay the expense of transit. *If, therefore, the charge for postage be made proportionate to the whole expense incurred in the receipt, transit, and delivery of the letter, and in the collection of its postage, it must be made uniformly the same from every post-town to every other post-town in the United Kingdom, unless it can be shown how we are to collect so small a sum as the thirty-sixth part of a penny.*

Again, the expenses of receipt and delivery are not much affected by the weight of each letter, within moderate limits; and, as it would take a nine-fold weight to make the expense of transit amount to one farthing, it follows *that, taxation apart, the charge ought to be precisely the same for every packet of moderate weight, without reference to the number of its enclosures.*

Having ascertained that the actual expense of conveying the letters from post-town to post-town forms so small a fraction of the whole apparent cost of primary distribution, it will be well to examine the other items of expenditure more minutely, with the view of discovering how far they are to be considered as the natural and necessary cost of distributing the correspondence of the country, and how far they result from the Post Office being made an instrument of taxation.

The items of expenditure now to be brought under consideration are those which are classed at p. 14,

in column F, as attendant on the receipt and delivery of letters. A reference to the table shows that they consist almost entirely of salaries to the officers and servants of the Post Office.

These persons, with a few exceptions, may be arranged in three classes; namely, Superintendents, (including Post-masters and Keepers of Receiving-houses,) Clerks (including Messengers), and Letter Carriers. In a Parliamentary Return (1835, No. 442) is a detailed statement of the salaries paid in the London, Dublin, and Edinburgh post offices, which amount to more than one-half of such salaries for the whole of the British Isles. Assuming that the remaining part is divided among the three classes in the same relative proportions as in these places, the account will stand thus :

	Actual cost in London, Edinburgh, and Dublin, per annum.	Estimated cost for the United Kingdom per annum.	Per centage on the whole cost of primary distribution, as deduced at p. 14, viz., £426,517.
Superintendents, including Post-masters and Keepers of Receiving-houses	£ 22,400	£ 38,300	
Clerks, including Messengers	61,500	105,400	25
Letter Carriers	46,000	78,800	18
Total.....	129,900	222,500	52

1. *Superintendents.* — The expense of superintendence in every establishment depends chiefly on

the variety and complexity of the operations to be performed. If by any arrangement the operations of the Post Office could be extensively simplified, there can be no doubt that the same amount of superintendence would suffice for a greatly increased amount of business. The causes of the present complexity, and the practicability of extensive simplification, will be considered more conveniently in connexion with the duties of the clerks.

2. *Clerks*.—The duties of the Clerks in the London Office will be taken as a specimen of those of the body generally; they are principally as follows. On the arrival of the Mails in the morning, to examine all the letters, in order to see that the charge upon each letter for postage has been correctly made, and that each Deputy Post-master has debited himself with the correct amount of postage for paid letters; to stamp the letters; to assort them for delivery; (in this the Letter Carriers assist;) to ascertain the amount of postage to be collected by each Letter Carrier, and to charge him therewith.

Previously to the departure of the Mails in the evening, the duties of the Clerks are principally to adjust the accounts for the post-paid letters brought from the Receiving-houses; to “tax” the unpaid letters; that is to say, to write on each the charge for postage; to stamp all; to assort them for dispatch to the different post-towns; to ascertain the amount of postage to be collected by each Deputy Post-master, and to charge him therewith.

It must be borne in mind that the public convenience requires that the delivery of letters should follow as closely as possible the arrival of the Mails; and that the receipt of letters should be continued as close as possible up to the departure of the Mails. It follows, therefore, that all these multifarious duties have to be performed in the shortest possible space of time, though some, from their difficulty and complexity, involve an enormous amount of labour, while their accurate performance demands a degree of vigilance rarely to be met with. Take for instance the financial proceedings in the evening. First there are the accounts to be settled with the Receivers (71 in number) for the post-paid letters; then there is to tax the letters, which, without counting the franks, are frequently as many as 40,000, and every one of which is to be examined with a candle to see whether it is single or double; * then the proper postage is to be determined, not only with reference to such inspection, but also with reference to the distance of the post-town to which it is addressed, and to be marked on the letter with pen and ink; and lastly, nearly 700 † accounts of postage are to be made out against as many Deputy Postmasters.

When the hurried manner in which these complex operations have to be performed is considered, it is

* 18th Report of Com. of Revenue Inquiry, p. 63.

† Parl. Return, 1835, No. 512, p. 6.

manifest that errors must frequently arise. There is also an obvious danger of extensive frauds on the Revenue from collusion between some of the Deputy Post-masters and those whose duty it is to charge them with the postage. The examination of each letter by a candle too, by revealing the contents, creates temptations to theft, which have too often been irresistible. In the Appendix will be found some proofs that the dangers here contemplated exist in practice.*

This liability to error and fraud renders it highly important that some sufficient check on the operations under consideration should be practised. The fact is, however, that no such check exists, the only security being in the conscientiousness of the Deputy Post-masters, whose duty it is, on receipt of their bags, to examine the charges placed to their accounts, and to correct any error which they may discover.

Mr. D. W. Stow, an officer of the Post Office, when asked by the Commissioners of Revenue Inquiry, "What is the longest operation in preparing the letters for delivery, the stamping, sorting, or taking the accounts?" replies, "Taking the accounts, because it leads to a difference very often which might retard the operation: the stamping is a mere mechanical thing, as well as the examination."†

There can be no doubt that the chief sources of

* Appendix, p. 69.

† 18th Report of Com. of Revenue Inquiry, p. 474.

all this trouble, and error, and fraud, exist in the complexity of the operations; a complexity arising out of the varying charges for postage, and the intermixture of paid and unpaid letters. The remedy must therefore be looked for in the means of simplification. If the postage of all letters were collected *after* their passage through the Central Office, something would be accomplished in simplifying the operations, but how much more would be effected if any means could be devised by which the postage of all letters should be collected *before* their passage through the Central Office!

For the purpose of estimating the advantages which would result from such an arrangement, suppose for a moment that all letters were post-paid, that the rates of postage were uniform, without regard to distance, (say a certain small sum per ounce,) and that the amount collected were transmitted to the Central Office, from the London Receiving-houses, and from the several post-towns, with the letters, or at least accounted for at the time of their transmission; the correct amount being ascertained and checked at the Central Office by weighing, and perhaps counting, the *mass* of letters received from each officer.

A little consideration will show the enormous effect which this arrangement would have in simplifying and accelerating the proceedings of the Post Office throughout the kingdom, and in rendering them less liable to error and fraud. Take as a

specimen its effect in the Central Metropolitan Office. There would be no letters to be taxed; no examination of those taxed by others; no accounts to be made out against the Deputy Post-masters for letters transmitted to them, nor against the Letter Carriers. There would be no want of checks; no necessity to submit to frauds and numberless errors for want of means to prevent or correct them.* In short, the whole of the financial proceedings would be reduced to a simple, accurate, and satisfactory account, consisting of a single item per day, with each Receiver and each Deputy Post-master.

Can there be a doubt that under such simple arrangements, especially if the operation of assorting the letters could be materially facilitated, (of which more hereafter,) the present staff of clerks would amply suffice for at least a four-fold amount of business? Still, however desirable such a simplification may be, its practicability has yet to be ascertained. But, before proceeding to this question, it will be convenient to consider whether the time of the remaining class of Post Office servants (the Letter Carriers) is capable of being economised.

3. *Letter Carriers.*—This is by far the most numerous class in the service of the Post Office; so much so, that although their individual salaries are comparatively low, the aggregate, as shown at

* The Post-master General is of opinion that the present complexity of the accounts is such as to render any certain check impracticable. Par. Pro. 1835. No. 443, pp. 5 and 6.

p. 20, forms a very important item in the account; any abridgment of the labours of this class of servants must therefore be of great economical importance. The evidence given before the Commissioners of Revenue Inquiry appears to indicate the means of attaining this desirable object.

At the time of the investigation (1828) there existed in London what was called the "early delivery" of letters; that is to say, any person for a small annual fee was privileged to receive his letters before the usual hour of delivery. The privilege, I believe, still exists, but to a much less extent.

The early delivery was effected thus: the letters in question were separated from the others and distributed by persons, (generally the Letter Carriers of remote quarters, while on their way to their own proper districts,) who delivered the letters at the respective houses, leaving the postage to be collected by the proper Letter Carrier of the district, who for that purpose made a second round after completing his ordinary delivery.

Mr. Benjamin Critchett, Inspector of the Inland Letter Carriers, was examined, among other matters, as to the time required for the early and late deliveries respectively; the following is an extract from his evidence thereon.*

* Since this evidence was given, the employment of Omnibuses for the conveyance of the Letter Carriers to the remote districts, and other arrangements, have caused the ordinary delivery of letters to commence much earlier.

“If a postman were to deliver the whole of his letters as he went along, not taking the money for any of them, and returned through his walk, and then collected the money, would they not all be delivered much earlier than they are now?—Certainly.

“And would it require more hands to do it than are now employed?—No.

“The man going back to receive the postage of the early letters must pass by the doors where he has delivered letters and received the postage?—Yes: I will describe the operation in two or three districts this morning: I will take Lombard-street, where the number of letters that were delivered this morning was 637.

“In Lombard-street?—Yes. The amount of postage £25 14s. 3d.

“You are confining yourself now to Lombard-street?—The Lombard-street district: Lombard-street, Clement’s-lane, Nicholas-lane, and various courts.

“Are you speaking of the general delivery?—I am speaking of the total number of letters sorted for that district—the Lombard-street district.

“And that were carried out by Letter Carriers?—That were carried out by Letter Carriers this morning; there were 637 letters, the amount of postage £25 14s. 3d. Of this number of letters, 570 were delivered early.

“Could you state the time within which they were delivered?—All in half an hour,

“What o’clock would that be?—That would be about half-past nine.

“They were delivered in half an hour from the time they were dispatched?—From the time they were dispatched: 570 were delivered early, the postage £22 19s. 4d.; and 67 delivered in the ordinary way, postage £2 14s. 11d.

“What time were they delivered?—Why, they would occupy the Letter Carrier about an hour and a half; then he commenced collecting the postage of the early delivery.

“What! would he be an hour and a half in delivering 67 letters?—Yes, he would thereabouts.

“Considering the extent of the district?—Yes, the time he would wait to get the money for a letter would be about two minutes to a house.

“Have you made any calculation?—Yes, I have one at the office.

“What do you estimate as the time for delivering a letter when the postage is received?—That will occupy him nearly two minutes.

“Two minutes at every house?—Yes; indeed some houses detain him at the door three, or four, or five minutes, in giving change, and various circumstances arise in the delivery of letters that detain the Letter Carriers.”*

* * * * *

“To deliver all the letters in the ordinary way in two hours and fifteen minutes will require from 70

* 18th Report of Com. of Revenue Inquiry, pp. 621, 622.

to 80 additional Letter Carriers, and this would not give so much accommodation to the public as the early delivery does, as nearly half the total number of letters are delivered early, in half an hour after they are dispatched from the Post Office.”*

The above evidence clearly shows that the ordinary delivery of letters is an exceedingly tedious, inconvenient, and consequently expensive process ; and that the cause of these evils is the hindrance to the delivery which arises from its being embarrassed with the collection of the postage. In the Lombard-street district it appears that while half an hour was sufficient for the delivery of 570 letters, when the postage was collected afterwards, it required an hour and a half for the delivery of only 67 letters, when the postage was collected at the same time, consequently that one delivery was about 25 times as quick as the other. This result probably represents the hindrance in an exaggerated form, as there is little doubt that those entitled to the early delivery were in the habit of receiving more letters each than those not so entitled ; but, after making every necessary allowance, there can be no doubt that the loss of time must be very considerable indeed.

It appears, then, that with reference to the abridgment of the labours of the Letter Carriers, as well as of the Clerks, the great desideratum is, that the postage of all letters should be paid in advance. If such an arrangement could by any means be effected, it would undoubtedly economize the time of the

* 18th Report of Commissioners of Revenue Inquiry, p. 632.

Letter Carriers even more than that of the Clerks. There would not only be no stopping to collect the postage, but probably it would soon be unnecessary even to await the opening of the door, as every house might be provided with a box* into which the Letter Carrier would drop the letters, and, having knocked, he would pass on as fast as he could walk. By this means a man would go through a district of moderate extent in half an hour, and deliver within it almost any number of letters; for it must be borne in mind, that in a town (and at present we are only considering the arrangements for towns) a Letter Carrier's walk would scarcely be lengthened by an increase, however great, in the number of letters to be delivered; and that even the number of houses at which he would have to call would be increased but in a low ratio.

This important relief to the Clerks and Letter Carriers would indeed be obtained at the cost of some additional labour to the Receivers and Deputy Postmasters, on whom would then devolve the whole duty of taking the postage. It must be remembered, however, that as these officers have already to receive and account for the postage upon about one-fifth† of the letters which pass through their hands, constant attendance is even now required; while

* A very trifling inducement would suffice to effect such a change. It would be obviously fair to instruct the Letter Carrier to pass any door not so provided, and to deliver the letter on a second round, charging a small sum, say a halfpenny, for his trouble.

† 18th Report of Com. of Revenue Inquiry, p. 54.

their labour is obviously much increased by the circumstance of the charge varying with each successive letter.

As we have seen that the above arrangements, if carried into practice, would secure a vast public benefit, we are naturally led to the consideration of the means for their adoption.

To so extensive a change there are, of course, many obstacles; some sacrifices are necessarily required; any plan, therefore, which holds out a fair prospect of surmounting the difficulty must justly be considered, even if not free from objection, as entitled to a careful and candid examination.

The essential elements of such a plan are, first, a very low rate of postage, to neutralise the objections on the part of the public to its being demanded in advance; and, secondly, a uniform rate of postage, to simplify the mode of accounting for its receipt. With respect to the latter element, it has already been shown (p. 19) that in fairness the rates of postage for primary distribution ought to be uniform; the cost of transit along the mail-roads, even for the greatest distances, being so trifling, as not to be expressible by the smallest coin. This part of the plan, therefore, appears to present no difficulty, and the only question is, whether it is possible to reduce the postage sufficiently low.

In order to ascertain the greatest extent to which this reduction may be carried, it will be necessary to calculate the cost of primary distribution under the

economical arrangements proposed above. It has already been shown that, under such arrangements, the present establishment of the Post Office, with some slight addition to the salaries, under the head "Superintendents," (the class to which Receivers and Deputy Post-masters belong,) would suffice, even if the amount of business to be transacted should increase four or five-fold. A considerable addition to the mileage would of course be required, as on some roads it certainly would be necessary to employ two, three, or even four mail-coaches. Assuming for the present that, owing partly to the reduction in postage, and partly to increased facilities of communication, the total number of letters, &c., passed through the Post Office would increase to four-fold the present amount, the calculation will be as follows :

Heads of charges. (See p. 14.)	Present cost of primary distribution within the United Kingdom. (See page 14, column D.)	Estimated future cost of primary distribution within the United Kingdom.
	£	£
Salaries and allowances	222,510	250,000
Special services and travelling charges	8,039	12,000
Conveyance of Mails, &c.	135,919	310,000
Packet service and port dues	4,987	10,000
Tradesmen's bills, building, and repairs	9,974	15,000
Rents of offices, tithes, and taxes ...	4,085	6,000
Law charges	5,913	9,000
Stationery, printing, and postage ...	3,539	6,000
Superannuation allowances, &c.	30,248	30,248
Menai and Conway bridges (tolls)...	1,303	3,000
	426,517	651,248

By the above estimate it appears that, if the correspondence of the country increase four-fold, i.e. amount to about 500,000,000 of letters, newspapers, &c., (see p. 11,) then upon the proposed arrangements the cost of primary distribution within the United Kingdom will amount to £651,248 per annum, producing an average cost per letter or newspaper of 32 hundredths of a penny, or one farthing and three-tenths of a farthing.

When it is considered that the mere transit of a letter by the mail-coaches costs practically nothing, and that the penny posts, of which there are about 200* in England alone, are stated by Sir Francis Freeling to be in many cases very profitable,† even though these pence have to be collected from house to house, there is nothing very surprising in this result. The following facts may be stated in corroboration of its accuracy.

The average cost of managing the twopenny post of London, notwithstanding the large allowance of weight, and the expensive manner in which the establishment is conducted, is only 34 per cent. on the receipts,‡ or about two-thirds of a penny per letter.

The distribution of the Penny Magazine is exactly parallel with the proposed primary distribution of letters. The magazine is sent to every part of the kingdom, and in considerable towns is delivered

* 18th Report of Com. of Revenue Inquiry, p. 585.

† 18th Report of Com. of Revenue Inquiry, p. 351.

‡ 21st Report of Com. of Revenue Inquiry, p. 4.

at the houses of the subscribers; but the penny charged for the magazine includes not only the cost of distribution, but the cost of eight large pages of letter-press and wood-cuts; and yet it is well known that the undertaking is a profitable one.

The carriers who ply between Birmingham and the neighbouring towns, to a distance of 12 or 13 miles, are in the constant habit of conveying letters, which they deliver at one penny each. It is very improbable that the carriers have any well-organised system of distribution, and of course they must be paid something for their risk in breaking the law; although, from the open manner in which they proceed, it may be inferred that the chance of penalty is not very great. I have been informed by a highly respectable merchant and manufacturer of Birmingham, that the number of letters distributed by these means very greatly exceeds, in his opinion, the number distributed within the same district by the Post Office.

It appears then that the cost of primary distribution can be reduced from 84 hundredths of a penny (p. 16) to 32 hundredths of a penny (p. 33) per letter, if the charge for postage can be reduced so low as to neutralise the objection on the part of the public to its being paid in advance; and if the assumed increase in the number of letters can be brought about. But the required increase in the number of letters must depend mainly on the extent to which the postage is reduced. An extensive reduction of postage appears

therefore to be the one thing needful. The postage must be brought sufficiently low to secure the advantages at which we aim, remaining only sufficiently high to afford the required revenue.

The cost of primary distribution under the new arrangements being only about one-third of a penny per letter, a profit or tax of 200 per cent. on such cost might be added, without raising the postage above one penny. A uniform rate of one penny would, I conceive, be sufficiently low to neutralise all *pecuniary* objection to its being invariably paid in advance; (other objections will be considered hereafter;) especially if the public were made to understand that its being thus paid were a necessary condition of so great a boon.* It can scarcely be doubted that so extensive a reduction in postage, together with the concurrent increased facilities of communication, would produce even more than the assumed increase in the number of letters.† But if it only produced an increase to the extent assumed, and if the preceding calculations are not greatly wrong, a uniform postage of one penny would, after defraying the expense of convey-

* For a more extensive examination of this part of the subject, see Appendix, p. 96.

† The number of newspapers and franked letters would, of course, not be affected by the change. An increase in the number of chargeable letters, in the ratio of $5\frac{1}{4}$ to one, would therefore be required, in order to increase the total number of letters and newspapers four-fold. The probable extent of the increase in the number of chargeable letters will be brought under consideration shortly.

ing franks and newspapers, produce a net revenue to the Exchequer of about £1,278,000 per annum,* or only about £280,000 less than the present amount. This rate of postage, then, appears to conform with all the conditions laid down: I therefore propose,—

That the charge for primary distribution, that is to say, the postage on all letters received in a post-town, and delivered in the same, or any other post-town in the British Isles, shall be at the uniform rate of one penny per half ounce;—all letters and other papers, whether single or multiple, forming one packet, and not weighing more than half an ounce, being charged one penny; and heavier packets, to any convenient limit (say a quarter of a pound), being charged an additional penny for each additional half ounce. The charge for weights exceeding half an ounce should not, perhaps, in strict fairness, increase at so great a rate; but strict fairness may be advantageously sacrificed to simplicity; and it is perhaps not desirable that the Post Office should be encumbered with heavy parcels.

As, however, to adopt this scale for the present twopenny and penny posts would in certain instances considerably advance the postage in these departments, it might be well to allow greater weight here, as, for instance, two ounces for a penny, four for two-pence, &c., and the maximum might be placed as high as a pound. If this difference of weight existed, it would be necessary to keep the local

* See Appendix, p. 80, for calculation of the probable revenue.

distribution separate from the general one, to a slight extent. No inconvenience would, however, arise from employing the same receiving-houses for both.

Having shown the practicability and even fairness of a uniform and low rate of postage, (the primary conditions of the simplicity of arrangements, and of the extension in the number of letters which we have contemplated,) our next step is to show the means by which such postage might be conveniently collected in advance, and accounted for by the collector.

The following is a sketch of two modes of collection, both of which I would submit for consideration. It is drawn out with reference to the metropolis, but a few very slight and obvious modifications would adapt either mode to any other town.

In either case the number of receiving-houses must be considerably increased, and one division, or more, of the principal offices in St. Martin's le Grand and at Charing Cross must be converted into receiving-houses similar to the others.

First mode of Collection.—The receiving-houses to be open shops: the slits through which letters are now passed to be employed for franked letters and newspapers only; a legible inscription to that effect being placed over each: * all chargeable letters to be

* To prevent mistakes arising out of the existing habits, it might for a time be advisable to remove the letter-box from the

brought to the counter, and the postage paid at the rate already specified; viz., a penny for each letter or packet not exceeding half an ounce, with an additional penny for each additional half ounce; the letter being weighed, if necessary, in the presence of the bringer, and stamped with the date and the address of the receiving-house, the marks being given by a *tell-tale stamp*; that is to say, a stamp, connected with mechanism (upon a plan well known) for the purpose of counting the letters as they were impressed. It would be unnecessary to mark the amount of postage, and therefore the stamp would not be varied. The letter, when stamped, to be thrown by the receiver into a box marked with the initial letter of the post-town to which it is addressed. Thus all letters, as received, would be assorted alphabetically; that is to say, all letters for post-towns beginning with A would be thrown together, &c.* A similar set of boxes would be required for newspapers, so long as the present arrangements respecting them exist,† the newspapers and

window to the interior of the shop; the shopkeeper would then have the opportunity of making an inquiry before a letter was dropped in.

* See Appendix, p. 74, for further details as to the alphabetic assortment.

† If the proposed arrangements should be adopted, it might perhaps be considered advisable to remove the stamp from newspapers, and to subject them to the same charge for postage as letters, or other printed papers. This would tend still further to simplify the proceedings of the Post Office; it would remove the

franked letters being taken from time to time from the receiving-box and assorted. All franked letters might be put into one box, as they would have to be inspected at the Central Office.

At the proper hour the letters and newspapers would be taken to the Central Office, at which time the receiver would settle the account for postage. In adjusting this account it would be unnecessary to attempt to ascertain the exact amount of postage he had actually received. Tolerable accuracy would be obtained by merely weighing the letters, and charging the receiver a certain rate per ounce; the rate of charge being so adjusted as to leave on the average a little profit for the receiver's trouble. But if it should be thought that a uniform rate of charge, according to weight, would in certain cases lead to too wide a departure from accuracy, it might be well to make the charge depend on a combination of weight and number. The tell-tale stamp of the receiving-house would at all times give an unerring report of the number of letters stamped,* and as a

temptation to fraudulent writing on newspapers, (a practice which at present obtains to an enormous extent, and which, even under the proposed arrangements, would not perhaps be altogether avoided,) and it would probably leave the revenue derived from newspapers nearly in its present state.

* I do not think it necessary to encumber this statement by pointing out all the provisions which would be required, if the proposed plan should come into operation. In the present case it is manifest that distinctive stamps should be employed for letters liable to charge, franked letters, and newspapers; the

means of preventing abstraction, it might be well to use a tell-tale stamp at the Central Office, the reckoning being recorded as the stamping of the letters from each receiving-house was completed.

The Deputy Post-masters at the several post-towns, in transmitting their letters to London, would account for the postage they received precisely in the same manner and under the same checks as the metropolitan receivers.

It is not necessary to enumerate all the advantages which would result from such an arrangement as this, indeed such an enumeration would be impossible, for it invariably happens in all extensive operations that simplification is productive of advantages which were unexpected. One, however, occurs to me as arising indirectly out of these arrangements, which is too important to be altogether omitted. A great source of trouble at the Post Office is, the incompleteness or inaccuracy of the addresses to the letters. Frequently these imperfections are apparent on the face of the letter; for instance, there is no inconsiderable number of letters put into the Post Office daily with no address whatever, and, what is very remarkable, not a few of these letters contain money. Now, as the receiver would have to look at the address of each letter before putting it into its proper box, and as this examination might take

two latter may or may not be tell-tale stamps. Many other provisions, which would soon be discovered in practice, have, for the sake of brevity, been purposely passed *sub silentio*.

place before the departure of the bringer of the letter, an opportunity would be afforded for supplying any very obvious deficiency.

The objections to this mode of procedure appear to be as follows :

1. It might, in rare instances, and in small towns, lead to an objectionable exposure of the parties engaged in mercantile correspondence, as their messengers, in delivering the letters at the Post Office, would be known.

2. Frauds, by the messengers pocketing the postage, would perhaps be numerous, unless the plan of taking receipts * were generally adopted, which would be attended with some trouble and expense.

3. The trouble and confusion arising from the great number of payments to be made at certain hours of the day would be considerable.

4. In accounting for the postage of letters, even though both number and weight should enter into the calculation, considerable fluctuations would occur in the Receiver's profit, which it is desirable to avoid. These objections are obviated by the—

Second mode of Collection.—A few years ago, when the expediency of entirely abolishing the newspaper stamp, and allowing newspapers to pass through the Post Office for one penny each, was under consideration, it was suggested by Mr. Charles Knight, that the postage on newspapers might be collected by selling stamped wrappers at one

* See Appendix, p. 76.

penny each. Availing myself of this excellent suggestion, I propose the following arrangement :

Let stamped covers and sheets of paper be supplied to the public from the Stamp Office or Post Office, or both, as may be most convenient, and sold at such a price as to include the postage. Letters so stamped would be treated in all respects as franks, and might, as well as franks, be put into the letter-box, as at present, instead of being delivered to the Receiver.

Covers at various prices would be required for packets of various weights ; and each should have the weight it is entitled to carry legibly printed with the stamp. The Receiver should take the packets from time to time from the box, examine them to see that the allowance of weight was not exceeded, and assort them as already described. If any packet exceeded the proper weight, it should be sent to the dead-letter office, opened, and returned to the writer : the delay thus occasioned, and the loss of the frank-stamp, being the penalty for carelessness. As a check on the Receiver, a few packets taken at random should be examined at the Central Office, and a fine levied for negligence.

Economy and the public convenience would require that sheets of letter paper of every description should be stamped in the part used for the address ; that wrappers, such as are used for newspapers, as well as covers made of cheap paper, should also be stamped ; and that every Deputy Post-master and

Letter Receiver, all over the kingdom, should be required to keep them on sale : a discount, such as is now given on stamps, would render it their interest to do so. Stationers also would be induced to keep them.

The stamp of the receiving-house should be struck upon the frank-stamp, to prevent the latter being used a second time.

For the forgery of these stamps their low price would leave but little temptation ; and the account of their issue, compared with the account of the number of letters passed through the Post Office, (kept as already described by the tell-tale stamp,) would lead to the detection of any extensive fraud.

Should experience warrant the Government in making the use of stamped covers universal, most important advantages would be secured ; advantages, indeed, of such magnitude, that before any exception whatever is admitted, the policy of such exception should be very fully considered.

1. The Post Office would be relieved altogether from the collection of the Revenue, and from all accounts relating to that collection. Distribution would be its only function.

2. The receipt of letters would be much more simple even than it now is ; as the present trouble of receiving money for the post-paid letters would be avoided.

3. Any necessary exception to the uniform rate of

postage (1*d.* per half-ounce) would, under this arrangement, be productive of comparatively little inconvenience. For instance, the greater weights proposed to be allowed in the local posts would be readily managed. Penny covers, and sheets for local posts, might be marked thus, when stamped,

“For Local Distribution.—The weight allowed is two ounces.”

Or all penny covers and sheets might be marked thus :

“For General Distribution.—The weight allowed is half-an-ounce.

“For Local Distribution.—The weight allowed is two ounces.”

It may, perhaps, be said that this plan only transfers the receipt of postage from the Post Office to the Stamp Office; but it will be recollected that at the latter the postage would be collected in large sums, the number of payments being reduced, probably, in the ratio of at least a thousand to one.

The cost of stamping such an enormous number of papers may appear to be a formidable objection to this arrangement. With the aid of machinery, however, this cost may be reduced to a mere trifle.

The only objection which occurs to me to the universal adoption of this plan is the following: Persons unaccustomed to write letters, would, perhaps, be at a loss how to proceed. They might send or take their letters to the Post Office without having had recourse to the stamp. It is true that

on presentation of the letter, the Receiver instead of accepting the money as postage, might take it as the price of a cover, or band, in which the bringer might immediately inclose the letter, and then re-direct it. But the bringer would sometimes be unable to write. Perhaps this difficulty might be obviated by using a bit of paper just large enough to bear the stamp, and covered at the back with a glutinous wash, which the bringer might, by applying a little moisture, attach to the back of the letter, so as to avoid the necessity for re-directing it. If the bringer should put the letter into the letter-box, there would be no resource but to send it to the dead letter office; but, if proper pains were taken to inform the public, and legibly to mark the letter-box, "For stamped Letters, Franks, and Newspapers only," such cases could seldom occur.

Probably, however, the preferable plan, in the first instance at least, would be to adopt a combination of the two modes, giving to the public an option, as regards packets not exceeding the half ounce, to use the stamp or pay the penny. If it were required that all packets exceeding the half ounce should be inclosed in stamped covers, (and the number being comparatively small, and their admission for the most part a novelty, no one could object to such an obligation,) the Receiver would have to account for penny letters only; and the index of the tell-tale stamp would at all times exhibit the exact amount of postage received:

no operation could be more simple or more free from the possibility of error.

I am aware that many consider the required payment in advance objectionable. In the Appendix, (page 96,) the principle is fully considered. I have there shown a modification of the preceding plan which might be adopted, if it should be thought impolitic at once to attempt the universal adoption of that principle. I do not insert the modification here, because, however useful it may be as a temporary expedient, I am decidedly of opinion that it ought to form no part of a permanent plan, and that to resort to it at all would be a step of very questionable policy.

INCREASED FACILITIES OF DISTRIBUTION.

The Commissioners of Revenue Inquiry begin their Report on the Post Office as follows: "The facility of frequent, punctual, and quick communication which the institution of the Post Office was calculated to secure, may be justly classed among the elements of profitable commerce. It is essential to the purposes of Government, and subservient to all the ends of national policy.

"In this view the establishment of the Post Office possesses a character distinct from, and an importance superior to its title to consideration as a productive branch of the revenue. Nor is its utility in this respect to be appreciated solely by the revenue derived

directly from it, for it may be considered also as auxiliary to other branches of the public income.

“But whatever distinction may be observed between the more general and primary purposes of this institution, and its value separately regarded as an immediate source of revenue to the Crown, it will be found that the same means may be employed to promote its several objects ; and that, in a prosperous state of the country, its productiveness, in a financial calculation, will be measured by the proportion in which, under judicious management, it is made to contribute to the interests, the convenience, and the habitual indulgence of the community.

“To prove the truth of this principle, it might be sufficient to refer to the immediate results of the well-known improvements, introduced in the year 1784, upon the suggestions of Mr. Palmer, in the circulation of letters within the now United Kingdom.

“Various causes have subsequently contributed to the vast progressive increase of the annual receipts of this department, which in twenty years, dating from the adoption of Mr. Palmer’s plan, were trebled, and have since become five-fold their previous amount. But a general comparison of the extent of the accommodation afforded, and of the quantity of correspondence maintained through the Post Office at different periods, will establish the principle already assumed, that the growth of this correspondence (and of the attendant revenue)

naturally keeps pace with the amendment and extension of the means of intercourse, and with the increased wealth, commerce, and prosperity of the country, and will show that this effect, although it may have been in some degree counteracted, has not been prevented by the restraints of augmented taxation.

“In looking at the Post Office, therefore, with a view to its regulation as a department of the revenue, it is indispensable that attention be principally directed to its more important uses, and to the efficiency of its arrangements for the attainment of those purposes.”*

There can be no doubt that one cause of the comparative falling off of the Post Office revenue is want of attention to the principles here laid down. The Post Office has too generally lagged behind other institutions in the progress of improvement, instead of being, as it might be, an example to the country of skilful and energetic management. Previously to the improvements of Mr. Palmer, the mail was about twice as long in proceeding from town to town as the stage-coaches. Mr. Palmer's improvements brought up the Post Office to an equality with other commercial institutions of his day, and, as stated by the Commissioners, led to an enormous increase of revenue. For many years past, while other institutions have been rapidly

* 18th Report of the Com. of Revenue Inquiry, pp. 3 and 4.

improving, the Post Office has again been nearly stationary; it has, consequently, fallen a second time in arrear, and, as a means of distributing the correspondence of the country, is, at present, lamentably inefficient.

In making these statements I imply blame to no one; to do so forms no part of the task which I have undertaken. It would, perhaps, be impossible for any one to read the able Reports which have been made by the past and by the present Commissioners of Inquiry, without feeling indignant at the disregard for the public interest, the jobbing and speculation which they expose.* It will be wise, however, to regard the past no further than may be useful in securing a better state of things for the future. To effect this will require an extensive change in the administration, and a reconstruction of the mechanism of the Post Office.

With regard to the administration of the Post Office, it may be remarked, that so long as the office of Post-master General is a political appointment, it is impossible that the individual selected, however anxious he may be efficiently to discharge his duty, can do more than acquire a general knowledge of the vast and complicated mechanism he is supposed to direct. The most efficient officer, therefore, is the secretary, but as he has not the requisite authority for effecting

* See especially the Report by the present Commissioners on the Packets Establishments. April 30, 1836.

such improvements as he may think necessary, the responsibility does not in fairness attach to him. Much may be expected from the known talent and energy of the gentleman recently appointed to this office, but it must be borne in mind that, if the preceding views are at all correct, the inefficiency of the Post Office results chiefly from the excessive and variable rates of postage; consequently that the removal of the evil depends on Legislative enactment: this consideration in a great measure explains the present state of things. Looking at those arrangements which were clearly within the control of the Post Office authorities, we find much that has received and has deserved general admiration; and in one respect, viz., the prompt and courteous attention paid to all letters of complaint, the Post Office has for many years been a model of excellence.*

It would here be out of place to enter into a general investigation of the defective system of the Post Office. I may, however, be allowed to mention a few facts.

About 6,000 of the letters which arrive in London

* It is not generally known that the Duke of Richmond, when Post-master General, was desirous of performing the duties of the office gratuitously, and that it was not until after he had been repeatedly urged by Government that he consented to accept a salary: even then it was only accepted prospectively. It is not, perhaps, consistent with the efficient discharge of important public duties, that the public servants should be unpaid, but it is impossible not to admire such an instance of generous disinterestedness.

by the morning mails, on their way to other towns, lie all day at the Post Office for want of a morning dispatch,* although there are excellent morning coaches from London to every part of the kingdom. The consequence of this delay is, that places corresponding through London, however near they may really be to one another, are, as regards facilities of communication by post, forced as far asunder as London and Durham.†

If a blank post-day intervene, the delay is even more remarkable. A letter written at Uxbridge after the close of the Post Office on Friday night, would not be delivered at Gravesend, a distance of less than forty miles, earlier than Tuesday morning.

The extent to which personal intercourse takes place between London and the district within a circuit of ten miles, that is to say, between the places of business and the homes of thousands of professional men and tradesmen, is shown by the continued current of stage-coaches and other carriages along every road. There can be no doubt that the communication by letter, in the same district, would be proportionately great if the Post Office afforded the necessary facilities; but such is the ludicrous tardiness of the three-penny post, that no one thinks of employing it where dispatch is of the slightest importance.

* 18th Report of Com. of Revenue Inquiry, p. 477.

† In the 7th Report of the Com. of Post Office Inquiry, just submitted to Parliament (Feb., 1837,) a morning dispatch of these letters is recommended.

To interchange letters between London and Hampstead, through the post, requires, under the most favourable circumstances, about ten hours: a messenger would walk over the ground in a quarter of the time.

A letter which shall arrive in London between six and seven o'clock, by a morning mail, would not be delivered at Hampstead, or any other place equally distant, till eleven or twelve o'clock.

A London tradesman residing at Hampstead, who should, from any cause, be prevented from returning home as usual in the evening, would be unable to prepare his family for his absence by a post letter, unless he wrote before three o'clock; and even after two o'clock a letter would be too late, if put into any district receiving-house.

If two letters were put into the proper district receiving-houses in London, between five and six o'clock in the evening, one addressed to Highgate, the other to Wolverhampton, (which lies 120 miles further along the same road,) the Wolverhampton letter would be delivered first.

In the charges for postage the most unaccountable anomalies exist; *e.g.*: there is a cross-post from Wolverhampton through Dudley, Stourbridge, and other places. Between Dudley and Stourbridge this post passes through the village of Brierly Hill. The postage of a letter from Wolverhampton to Dudley is 4*d.*; but from Wolverhampton to Brierly Hill, some miles further on, it is only one penny.

The remedy for the defective arrangements which

lead to these and many other inconveniences and anomalies, is no doubt, to a great extent, independent of the reduction in postage which has been recommended: the increase in the number of letters, resulting from that reduction, would, however, greatly facilitate the necessary reforms. With regard to more frequent departures of the Mails, for instance, as two or more coaches would probably be required on each mail-road, they might arrive and be dispatched one in the morning and one in the evening, not only without additional expense, but with great advantage to the Post Office, as a means of preventing an inconvenient accumulation of business at one hour of the day, and also as a means of reducing the number of cross-posts, and thus *centralising* the business of the Post Office. There are serious objections to numerous cross-posts. Hitherto it has been found impossible satisfactorily to check the receipts for postage; and the number of cross-post letters which are lost is proportionately very great.*

If the facilities for the general distribution of letters were rendered adequate to the wants of the public; and if the local distribution of the metropolitan district,† and of similar districts about all large towns,

* 18th Report of Com. of Revenue Inquiry, p. 489.

† The three-penny post is peculiarly in want of improvement. Its operations are not only slow, but irregular and expensive. The mileage for the wretched hacks which carry the bags is twice as great as for the mail-coaches. The Commissioners of Revenue Inquiry (Twenty-first Report, p. 46) recommend the employment of the stage-coaches. To this it has been objected, that their punctuality cannot be depended upon;

were managed, as it might easily be, so as to afford the means of frequent and rapid communication, these causes alone would produce a great increase of letters.* The extent of the increase thus obtained, as well as the extent of that which would result from the reduced postage, does not admit of exact calculation; but, judging from the effects produced by similar causes, (as the increase of letters resulting from Mr. Palmer's improvements, and the greatly extended consumption of any article in general request which (Parliamentary Report, 1835, No. 443, p. 21;) but surely the means employed for enforcing punctuality on the part of the mail-coaches are not less applicable to coaches travelling a short distance. Indeed all doubt on this subject is fully removed by the successful experiment of the West India Dock Company. For some time past the coaches which run every quarter of an hour between Billiter Square and the West India Docks have been quite as punctual in their departure and arrival, and nearly as quick, as the mail-coaches. This improvement is the result of a contract which the Dock Company has entered into with the coach proprietors for the conveyance of dispatches between the Company's office in Billiter Square and the Docks; by which contract punctuality is secured under certain penalties.

* The increase of travelling between places connected by railways may be cited in support of this view. The fares between such places have not been much reduced by the railways; (in some instances they are not reduced at all;) and yet it has been shown by Dr. Lardner that the number of travellers between places so connected has increased nearly four-fold. (See the Reports of the Bristol meeting of the British Association for the Advancement of Science.) In his evidence before the Parliamentary Committee on the Blackwall railway, Dr. Lardner states the number of persons conveyed along the Dublin and Kingston railroad, in a single year, to be about a million and a quarter.

invariably follows a considerable reduction in price,) there is scarcely a doubt, in my opinion, that the total increase in the number of letters would exceed that which has been assumed.

The increase of MS. letters alone would be very great, for, in the first place, many more would be written, especially by the poorer and more numerous classes; and, in the next place, all, or nearly all, would be distributed by the Post Office; but the great increase would probably be in the transmission of printed circulars, prospectuses, catalogues, and prices current. In the opinion of commercial men, enormous numbers of such papers would be distributed by the Post Office, if the rates of postage were low. The question as to the probable increase is fully considered in the Appendix, (p. 83.)

Secondary distribution of letters, or that distribution which proceeds from each post-town as a centre, to places of inferior importance. In the present state of things, the secondary distribution of letters is in some places a source of loss. This appears to me to be undesirable: every branch of the Post Office ought, in my opinion, to defray its own expenses, although it is, at the same time, important that the ramifications should be as numerous as possible. The most equitable arrangement appears to be this: let the whole weight of taxation be thrown on the primary distribution, which ought to include every place which can be reached without absolute loss to the revenue, and let each department of the secondary distribution just defray its own expenses.

As some gentlemen, for whose opinion I have a very high respect, think that letters should be distributed for the same charge in all districts, even where, from the thinness of the population, their distribution would be a source of considerable loss to the Revenue, I think it necessary to examine this part of the subject more fully.

In the first place, it may be remarked, that a limit must be drawn somewhere. No one would contend that letters are to be distributed at the minimum rate over a district such as may be found in many parts of Scotland and Wales, and even in some parts of England, where people in the receipt of letters live two or three miles asunder. A system of secondary distribution must, therefore, be provided for. It may, however, be said, give a discretionary power to some one; but a discretionary power lets in favouritism and error, whereas a self-regulating principle is a security against these evils. It would, perhaps, be some approach to a definite arrangement, to say that all villages shall be included under the primary delivery. I very much doubt if any important village would, under economical management, be excluded, by the principle which I advocate, from at least one delivery per day, (and there could be no necessity for a double dispatch to small places off the direct lines of road). The question, however, is, whether one part of the distribution shall be conducted at the expense of the other part?

It is said, that it is the interest of society to make some pecuniary sacrifice for the purpose of sending

the post into remote places; because, generally speaking, they are the less penetrable retreats of ignorance. As an abstract proposition this is undeniable; and by extending the post to every place to which it can be conveyed without *injury* to the Revenue, the principle would be to a great extent adopted; inasmuch as such an arrangement would throw not only all the tax on the more populous places, but all the fixed expenses of superintendence, &c. : but to attempt to go beyond this, would, as it appears to me, be sacrificing the interests of the more populous, without benefiting the less populous places. For if the charge be in all cases made uniform, it is manifest either that the revenue must suffer, or that the charge, as regards the large towns, must be advanced. If Government can give up the revenue, there is no difficulty in the matter; but if not, the adoption of this principle must lead to an increase in the charge on all letters. There is no eligible medium between a penny and two-pence, therefore the universal charge would become two-pence: but two-pence per letter, or a penny in addition to the primary charge, would, in all probability, suffice for the secondary distribution, as in very remote places there might be a delivery on the alternate days only, as at present. Thus, for the sake of uniformity, postage would be doubled to the whole community, when doubling it for the part only where the transmission is accompanied with increased expense would be sufficient to secure the revenue from injury. It appears, then, that the adoption of the principle under considera-

tion would, as already stated, injure the towns without benefiting the villages.

Nor would the general revenue be very much augmented by such an arrangement. A charge of two-pence per letter, or even three-halfpence, would probably exclude the great mass of printed correspondence, and it would diminish the correspondence of all kinds: it would also tend to maintain, as between large towns, the contraband conveyance of letters, and thus the Post Office would, to a considerable extent, as at present, have to distribute the least profitable part of the correspondence only.

The following is a sketch of the plan of operations which I would suggest.

Let the inhabitants of any district, acting through the Guardians of the Poor or other recognised authority, be entitled, on paying in advance a small annual fee to the Deputy Post-master of the town to which their letters are dispatched, to require that a bag shall be made up for the district; and let them arrange for fetching and carrying the bag, and for the delivery and collection of letters; charging the expense, which would be very trifling, upon the parochial rates, or upon each letter, as may be most convenient.* An extra postage, to be collected on the delivery of each letter, would, in a country dis-

* What are called fifth clause posts, or posts established on a guarantee given by the parties benefited to defray the expense, may be considered as in some measure a precedent for the proposed arrangement. See the evidence of Sir F. Freeling, Eighteenth Report of the Commissioners of Revenue Inquiry, p. 351.

trict, delay the delivery but little, as the time of the Letter Carrier is occupied chiefly in walking from house to house.

The proposed arrangements should in each case be submitted to the approval of the central authority, (the Post-master General or Commissioners,) whom it might perhaps be necessary to empower to make arrangements for secondary distribution in any instance in which the local authority declined or neglected to act.

If this plan were adopted, the central authority of the Post Office would be relieved of nearly all care with respect to the secondary distribution of letters; the frequency, and, consequently, the expense of which would in each instance be regulated in exact accordance with the wants of the district.

Foreign and Colonial Letters.—For the sake of simplicity in accounting for the postage, it is very desirable that the Foreign and Colonial letters should be subjected to as nearly as practicable the same regulations as Inland letters.

As it will probably be impossible in all cases to provide for the English postage on letters received from foreign countries being paid in advance, some peculiar arrangement with reference to foreign letters appears to be required. The mode of dealing with them, which suggests itself to my mind, is the following:

Let all foreign letters on *leaving* this country be subjected to a double rate of English postage, but let foreign letters received into this country be

delivered free. The postage claimed by the foreign government being in each case paid by the foreign resident.

This arrangement would appear to obviate the necessity for all negotiation with foreign governments on the subject of postage, and it would be practically the same in its results as though the English postage were charged in both directions. The only difference being, (with few exceptions not worth regarding,) that in an interchange of letters the English resident would pay his share of the postage at once instead of at twice. As this arrangement would be an exception to the penny rate, it would be well to require that all letters addressed to foreign countries should be enclosed in the stamped covers already named. These covers should be legibly marked "Foreign Letter," and sold at uniform rates.

If, as I would recommend, the rates of postage already proposed for Inland letters were extended to Foreign letters, the prices of covers for Foreign letters would be exactly double those for Inland letters; but as it appears necessary to treat Foreign letters differently from others, no inconvenience would arise to the operation of the general plan if the prices were higher.

For the sake of simplicity it appears desirable to treat all foreign letters alike, although certain Governments might be willing to require payment of the whole postage in advance, and to account to the English Government for the English portion.

And as, in many minds, the distinction between a foreign country and one of our colonies is not clearly defined, it would be desirable perhaps that Colonial letters should be placed under the same regulations as Foreign letters. If this were done, the covers would be marked "Foreign or Colonial Letter."

The reduction here proposed in the postage of Foreign and Colonial letters might easily be effected, for the increase in the number would be such that the payments for ship-letters might be reduced from 2d., the present rate, to a farthing each, and yet amply remunerate the masters of vessels.*

The foregoing sketch will, I hope, sufficiently indicate the nature and extent of the reform which appears to be required in the Post Office. The necessary limits to a paper of this description have prevented my exhibiting the plan in all its details, and many auxiliary arrangements have been altogether omitted.

As my object has been to carry out the principles

* There is perhaps scarcely any measure which would tend so effectually to remove the obstacles to emigration, and to maintain that sympathy between the colonies and the mother country, which is the only sure bond of connexion, as the proposed reduction in the postage of colonial letters. The importance of promoting voluntary emigration from Ireland in aid of the Poor Laws, renders this consideration, at the present time, deserving of the greatest attention.

which I have endeavoured to develop to their full extent, I have avoided, except in one or two instances, speaking of any improvements which do not form essential parts of my plan; it would be easy to show that, with a less extensive reduction of postage than that which I have proposed, much may be done towards increasing the facilities of communication, and securing the collection of the revenue. I earnestly hope, however, that a reform will take place, at once thorough and complete; the more rigidly the subject is investigated, the more, I feel assured, will the practicability of the measures here proposed be made manifest.

The following is a summary of the conclusions which it is believed have been established in the preceding paper.

1. That the present cost of primary distribution is, for the most part, the result of complex arrangements at the Post Office.

2. That these complex arrangements would be avoided, if postage were charged, without regard to distance, at a uniform rate, (which is shown to be the only fair rate with reference to the expenses incurred,) and were collected in advance.

3. That the postage might be collected in advance, if reduced to the rate proposed; viz., one penny for each packet not exceeding half an ounce in weight, with an additional penny for each additional half ounce.

4. That, owing to the great simplicity of the arrangements which might be adopted under these conditions, the present establishment of the Post Office, with a slight addition, would suffice for a four-fold increase of business.

5. That this increase of business would lead to greatly increased facilities of communication, as, for example, two departures and two arrivals of the London mails per day.

6. That these increased facilities, together with the greatly reduced charges, would have the effect of increasing the number of chargeable letters, in all probability, at least $5\frac{1}{4}$ -fold; which increase (the number of franks and newspapers continuing as at present) would produce the four-fold increase of business, for which, as it has been shown, the present establishment of the Post Office, with a slight addition, would suffice.

7. That the necessary cost of primary distribution is not the present actual cost, viz., 84 hundredths of a penny, but only 32 hundredths of a penny; the difference, viz., 52 hundredths of a penny, arising from the employment of the Post Office in levying an excessive tax, and from the consequent expensiveness of arrangements and restriction of correspondence.

8. That in consequence of the great reduction in the necessary cost of primary distribution which would be effected by the proposed arrangements, the proposed low rate of postage would yield a profit

or tax of 200 per cent. on such necessary cost of primary distribution; which, after paying for the distribution of franks and newspapers, would afford a probable net revenue of £1,278,000 per annum.*

9. That the secondary distribution of letters ought to be untaxed, and the small unavoidable expense defrayed, in each instance, by the inhabitants of the district for whose benefit it is established; also that it may be so managed as not, in any degree, to interfere with the simplicity of the arrangements proposed for effecting the primary distribution.

In treating this subject, it is not improbable that the want of *practical* familiarity with the arrangements of the Post Office may have led to some misconception in matters of minor importance; but I am not without hope that any such disadvantage may be counterbalanced by the absence of those prejudices in favour of an established routine, to which practical men are peculiarly, and, perhaps, unavoidably liable: and I feel assured that no misconception can possibly have arisen which materially affects the results at which I have arrived. The data from which these results are deduced are taken chiefly from Parliamentary Reports; they, as well

* The amount of revenue realized will, of course, depend chiefly on the increase in the number of letters, &c., the extent of which is necessarily very much a matter of conjecture; there is no doubt, however, that a large revenue will be obtained. See Appendix, p. 80, for a full examination of this question.

as the calculations, are fully stated, and are consequently open to examination and correction.

Besides the state of the revenue and the necessities of commerce, there are other circumstances which clearly show that the present is a very desirable time for effecting the reforms here suggested.

The rapid extension of railroads now going on would of itself, in a short time, inevitably work a revolution in the system of the Post Office. Between Manchester and Liverpool, instead of one direct post per day, as before the construction of the railroad, there are now four, which alone produce a revenue of nearly £11,000 per annum. Indeed, it is obvious that the extensive employment of railroads will render it necessary to re-model the whole system of distribution. Let other independent changes then be made, while there is time to effect them.

The public attention, too, thanks to the persevering exertions of Mr. Wallace, whose success shows how much may be accomplished even by one Member of Parliament who shall thoroughly devote himself to his purpose, is at length beginning to awake to the evils of the present system; and the newspapers already manifest frequent indications of a growing anxiety for their removal.

Judging from the rapid growth of public opinion which we have recently witnessed with regard to other institutions, we may expect that in a few years, or even months, if "the still small voice" which, at present, gives scarcely audible expression to half-

formed desires, be neglected, it will swell into a loud, distinct, and irresistible demand; and then a reform, which would now be received with gratitude, as one of the greatest boons ever conferred on a people by its Government, would perhaps be taken without thanks, and even with expressions of disappointment, because less extensive than unreasonable people might have expected.

Fortunately this is not a party question, some of the leading men of each political party having expressed themselves favourable to great changes. The Duke of Richmond, Earl Spencer, and Lord Ashburton, in the House of Lords, and Viscount Lowther, Mr. Hume, Mr. Wallace, Mr. Warburton, and many others, in the House of Commons, have declared themselves in favour of extensive reforms; the necessity for which may almost be said to have been acknowledged by the present Government, when they proposed to appoint a Commission of management, and by the late Government, when they appointed a Commission of Inquiry. Lord Ashburton, whose opinion is deserving of great attention, appears to think that the cheap transmission of letters is so important that postage ought to be relieved altogether from taxation.

It is believed, therefore, that the proposed reform, if undertaken by Government, would not meet with opposition. Its object is not to increase the political power of this or that party, but to benefit all sects in politics and religion; and all classes, from the highest to the lowest. To the rich, as to the less wealthy,

it will be acceptable, from the increased facilities it will afford for their correspondence. To the middle classes it will bring relief from oppressive and irritating demands which they pay grudgingly; estimating them even beyond their real amount, because probably of their frequent recurrence—which they avoid by every possible contrivance, and which they would consider quite intolerable if they knew that nearly the whole is a tax. And to the poor it will afford the means of communication with their distant friends and relatives, from which they are at present debarred. It will give increased energy to trade; it will remove innumerable temptations to fraud; and it will be an important step in general education: the more important, perhaps, because it calls on Government for no factitious aid, for nothing in the shape of encouragement, still less of compulsion; but merely for the removal of an obstacle, created by the law, to that spontaneous education which happily is extending through the country, and which, even the opponents of a national system will agree, ought to be unobstructed in its progress.

We see, then, that the state of the revenue, the improved means of conveyance, the necessities of commerce, the proposed alterations in the controlling authority, the state of public opinion,—all things concur in rendering the present the most desirable time for a complete reform of the Post Office. A more popular measure could not be discovered. It would bring immediate, substantial, practical, indis-

putable relief to all. A thorough investigation will, I am satisfied, prove the practicability of the extensive reforms here suggested: but the most superficial examination will manifest the perfect ease with which great improvements may be effected. Let the Government, then, take the matter in hand; let them subject these proposals to the severest scrutiny, availing themselves of the information possessed by the able men who constitute the present Commission of Inquiry; let them proceed with that boldness which the existing state of the revenue justifies and requires, and they will add another claim—not inferior to any they now possess, nor one which will pass unregarded—to the gratitude and affection of the people.

A P P E N D I X.

No. 1.

ERRORS AND FRAUDS ARISING OUT OF THE PRESENT MODE OF COLLECTING THE POSTAGE.

The following extracts are from the Eighteenth Report of the Commissioners of Revenue Inquiry.

“It is also to be observed, that upon the taxation of letters in the evening there is no check, there being no examination similar to that which takes place in the morning in the Inland Office, and the duty of the tellers being confined to a computation of the general amount of the postage chargeable against each Deputy Post-master.*

* * * *

“The species of control which is exercised over the Deputy Post-masters is little more than nominal; and its defectiveness will be more fully seen hereafter from the necessary remarks upon the practice incidental to it in other offices. We therefore felt the more desirous to ascertain what degree of protection this portion of the revenue had derived from the practical conduct of the business relating to it in the Inland Department. An examination of the letter bill books, for this purpose, disclosed a series of inaccuracies, in the charges raised against the Deputy Post-masters in that department, far exceeding that frequency of

* Eighteenth Report of the Commissioners of Revenue Inquiry, p. 66.

minute error, for which, considering the complicated nature of the duties, and the rapidity with which they are required to be executed, we were prepared to make allowance. In many instances, it appeared upon inspection, that for twenty-five successive days the 'Office Account,' as it is called, differed from the charges admitted by the Deputy Post-masters, and this with reference to towns affording the most considerable revenue, as Hull, Brighton, Exeter, Plymouth, Birmingham, Liverpool. Your Lordships may observe, on referring to the evidence of Mr. Johnson, who combines the duties of a President of the Inland Office with those of a senior clerk in the Letter Bill Office, and should therefore be peculiarly conversant with this branch of the business, that such a continued series of differences is not regarded as unusual in most of the large towns. His statement is corroborated by Mr. Brown, a clerk also in the Letter Bill Office, who says that in the large towns there is scarcely a night that some variation does not occur.

"We do not pretend to offer any accurate pecuniary estimate of the general result of the imperfect practice in raising these charges against the Deputy Post-masters; but we have grounds for stating, so far as our scrutiny has extended, that the 'Office Accounts' have most frequently fallen short of the true amounts of charge as corrected and admitted by the Deputy Post-masters. A comparative statement which we caused to be made from the Letter Bill Books of the accounts of 184 post towns, included in the first, second, and third divisions, for the months of July and August last, showed that in the former month, in 118 out of 158 cases, and in the latter, in 113 out of 168 instances, an excess of charge was admitted by the Deputy Post-masters beyond the amounts of the respective office accounts for those periods. It is remarkable that in some of those instances, as of Bath and Bristol, the daily differences consisted uniformly of short charges against the Deputy Post-masters throughout the period of two months, and the same was observable in the case of Plymouth for the month of August. The short charges against the two first-mentioned towns in this period amounted to £47 0s. 0½*d.* The total excess upon the whole of the divisional accounts alluded to

(that is, the additional revenue brought to account by Deputy Post-masters beyond what they had been originally charged with in the Inland Office) amounted to £133 5s. 4½*d.*; the overcharges in the same period amounting to £16 10s. 7*d.* To what amount errors, either of taxation or telling, may have escaped correction it is not possible to ascertain; and we do not offer this statement as any criterion whereon to found any calculation of the extent of the differences that may have arisen upon the accounts at large. In one instance of recent occurrence, which has fallen under our inspection, a short charge of £16 4s. against a Deputy Post-master, (as admitted by himself,) appeared within a period of twelve days: in another, a sum of £7 4s. 7*d.* was added by a Deputy Post-master to the charge of one day. It has, however, been stated to us that the duties here alluded to never were so accurately performed as of late.*

It may be here remarked, that the Post Office authorities do not appear to have availed themselves of the means afforded by the wonderful powers of the machinery of the present day, for facilitating and rendering more certain the different operations. The present varying rates of postage, no doubt, present a great difficulty; still I do not hesitate to say, that it would be quite practicable to construct a stamp which at one blow should impress both the date and the required charge, whatever that may be, and register mechanically both the number of letters stamped, and the total amount of postage charged; and that the use of such a stamp, so far from retarding the operations, would, in all probability, much accelerate them.

As regards the Cross Posts, such a machine would be invaluable. Its use would render loss to the revenue from fraud or even error, next to impossible; while at present, however unsatisfactory the mode of accounting for the direct postage may be, that of accounting for the cross postage, which amounts to nearly £800,000 per annum, is even more so.

The following is part of the evidence of Mr. Robert Watts, an

* Eighteenth Report of Commissioners of Revenue Inquiry, p. 66.

officer, whose duty consisted in superintending the assorting of letters at the Central Office.

“ Did you ever happen to detect the secreting of letters?—Not often; I was once at an unpleasant concern of that kind: *unfortunately those cases have very often occurred*, but I cannot say that I individually detected any other person.

“ In those instances in which letters have been lost, letters carrying money for instance, has a detection taken place frequently in the office?—*No, not often.*

“ How has the detection taken place?—It used to do more when the paper circulation took place, the notes used to be traced to the parties, they used to be passed off in the neighbourhood of the letter carrier, they used to be traced by the solicitor: *but certainly detection in the office is of rare occurrence.*”*

I am indebted to Mr. G. Napier, Advocate Depute, for the following interesting account of the discovery and conviction of an offender in the Edinburgh Post Office, who had abstracted a bank note from a letter. The trial took place at Edinburgh, in March, 1834.

In January, 1834, Mr. Duncan, a merchant at Liverpool, put into the Post Office there a letter addressed to his mother, at Broughty Ferry, in Forfarshire, and containing a Bank of England note for £50 sterling. The letter, which had been expected on a particular day, not having reached the old lady, she immediately wrote to her son on the subject, and he again, being a mercantile man, and having kept a memorandum of the date and number of the note, immediately wrote to the Bank of England to stop payment of it. Inquiry was also immediately made at the different post offices of Liverpool, Edinburgh, Dundee, and Broughty Ferry, through all of which it should have passed in the proper course of transmission to the place of destination, but no trace of it could thus be got; no trace as to where it was lost, or even that it had ever been seen in the possession of the Post Office at all. All that could be learned was, that the letter con-

* Eighteenth Report of Commissioners of Revenue Inquiry, p. 499.

taining the bank note had been put into the Liverpool Post Office, and had not reached its destination.

It happened, however, that one of the Tellers of the Commercial Bank of Edinburgh, being one night in the pit of the theatre, had his attention particularly attracted, by some accidental circumstance, to a person sitting immediately in front of him. The very next day a person, whom the Teller at once recognised to be the same individual, although completely altered in dress, being now muffled up in a cloak, and wearing green spectacles, and having a fur cap drawn much over his face, called at the Commercial Bank, and presented to the next Teller a £50 Bank of England note, to be exchanged in Commercial Bank notes, who, according to custom, requested the person to write his name and address on the back. The person then wrote on the back of the note the words, "Jo. Wilford, College Post Office," and the money was paid him. When he had gone, the brother Teller, who had been in the theatre, asked, from mere curiosity, who that was, and was shown the signature upon the note. The note was then transmitted in the usual course to the Bank of England, and was there discovered to be the note stolen from Mr. Duncan's letter. It was then returned to the Commercial Bank for inquiry, and from the accidental circumstance already mentioned, the Teller who had been in the theatre at once recollected the appearance of the person who had presented it. A clue being thus got, it was thought proper first to ascertain whether that person could be found amongst the officers of the Post Office at Edinburgh. The Teller was therefore placed in a room into which every officer of the Post Office, as he arrives in the morning, comes to enter his name in a book, and amongst them the Teller there saw the person who had presented the stolen note. This person was James Wedderburn Nicol, who was of course apprehended, and in his lodgings, which were immediately searched, was found the fur cap, the spectacles, and a considerable portion of the Commercial Bank notes, or at least the same description of notes, for they could not be expressly identified. It was also ascertained that Nicol had borrowed the cloak in which he had appeared at the

bank, and the whole had been so adroitly managed, that if the proof had not been particularly strong against him, he might have broken it down by proof of an *alibi*, as his absence at the Post Office had not been noticed, he having quietly slipped out at a favourable moment, run to his lodgings and disguised himself, got the note changed, thrown off his disguise, and returned to his place in the Post Office, in an unaccountably short time.

It appeared that Nicol, who was well connected, and it is understood of previously good character, was tempted to abstract the letter, from having observed the presence and value of the note it contained, when, in the discharge of his duty, he held the letter up to a strong light for the purpose of ascertaining whether it was single or double. He pleaded guilty to the charge of theft, and was sentenced to transportation for life.

This story serves to illustrate the temptations to which those in the employment of the Post Office are exposed: it shows also that while the opportunities for the commission of fraud are frequent, the chance of detection is exceedingly remote. But for a curious combination of accidental circumstances it appears probable that this delinquent would have escaped. The narrative also leads to this reflection, that had either of two mistaken arrangements not existed, the offence would not, in all probability, have been committed. First, if postage were not so high, the note would probably have been cut into two parts and sent at different times. And secondly, if letters were charged by weight, instead of by the number of separate pieces of paper they contain, it would not be necessary for some one to hold up each before a light to examine its contents, and thereby be placed under strong temptation.

No. 2.

PREPARATORY ASSORTMENT OF LETTERS.

The Commissioners of Revenue Inquiry* recommend a preparatory assortment of letters at the receiving-houses, similar

* Eighteenth Report, p. 64.

to that here proposed. To this recommendation it has been objected by the Post-master General, that "the receivers are tradesmen, and any operation with the letters in an open shop, beyond the mere transfer from the receiving-box to the bag, must be highly objectionable, even if it tended to forward the business at the General Post Office; but any attempt at such assortment, with nearly 700 post towns classed in 24 divisions, would lead to extensive confusion, and would retard instead of expediting the delivery."* But the objection here stated does not appear applicable to the plan which I have proposed; under that plan the letters *would* be merely transferred from the receiving boxes to the bag.

The present mode of procedure is, for the letters to be taken to the Central Office unassorted: at the Central Office they are first assorted into twenty-four divisions, each division corresponding to a line of road,—that is, all letters which go by the same mail-coach are put into a heap, and these heaps are then subdivided, so as to bring all letters for the same post-town together.

It appears, then, that a preparatory assortment of letters into twenty-four divisions is common to both the existing and the proposed arrangement. The preparatory alphabetic assortment, however, possesses two decided advantages over the other; first, it is made before the receiving-houses close; secondly, it is much more easily effected, and consequently much more rapidly and accurately done: for it requires no knowledge of the mechanism to be afterwards employed for the distribution of letters, but merely the power of deciding quickly whether a certain place is a post-town or not, a fact which the receiver may always ascertain by consulting an alphabetic list, and such a list is frequently consulted at present to ascertain the rate of postage; or, as the number of letters which present any difficulty must always be small, he may put them apart for assortment at the Central Office, by those who have more experience than himself; while the preparatory assortment now practised requires a

* Parliamentary Return, 1835, No. 512, p. 6.

knowledge not only as to whether certain places are post-towns or not, but as to the particular line of road to which every one of the 700 post-towns belong. Frequent practice will certainly accomplish much ; but it may be doubted whether, amid such a multitude of facts, any amount of practice will afford that perfect familiarity which is essential to a high degree of accuracy and dispatch. If the alphabetic arrangement were adopted, it is probable that the first operation, after the letters arrived at the Central Office, would be, to bring all letters for the same post-town together ; they would then be put into the bags, and the bags assorted for the roads. Possibly experience may show that even more progress in the assortment might be made at the Receiving-houses. Much would be accomplished by providing separate boxes for a few of the largest towns, as Dublin, Glasgow, Edinburgh, Liverpool, Manchester, Birmingham, and Bristol. If this were done, a very considerable portion of the whole number of letters would be finally assorted ; for in these towns, and in London, nearly one-half of the Post Office revenue is collected.*

No. 3.

RECEIPTS FOR LETTERS.

There is an important improvement, the mention of which was reserved for the Appendix, because it is not essentially connected with those great changes which it has been the main object to recommend.

The evidence given before the Commissioners of Revenue Inquiry shows the great desirability of some plan which would render it practicable and easy for the Post Office to give, when required, receipts for letters sent to the post.

In many instances such a plan would be the means of tracing lost letters : oftentimes it would protect the Post Office from needless applications and unfounded complaints ; and it would oppose

* Tables of Revenue, &c., 1834, p. 44.

an effectual bar to the fraudulent conduct of servants, who are known, in many instances, to have destroyed letters, in order to pocket the postage.

I should propose that every person desiring a receipt should, on taking the letter to the receiving-house, present a copy of the superscription, on which the Receiver should stamp a receipt, with the date, and his own address ; precisely such a stamp as is placed on the letter would suffice.

I propose that the charge for such receipt should be a halfpenny, and that, as a means of collecting the same, it should be required that the copy of the superscription should be made on a printed form, to be provided by the Post Office, and to be sold to the public at the rate of a halfpenny each, by the Receiver, either singly or in books, as might be required ; a certain profit on their sale being allowed by the Post Office, as a remuneration to the Receiver.

These receipts would, I imagine, constitute good legal evidence of delivery ; and as they might be made to form a cheap register of all letters dispatched by post, many persons would probably adopt the practice of taking them for that reason alone.

I am informed that precisely such receipts as are here described, except that a printed form is not employed, are given gratuitously in the Presidency of Madras.

As a large number of persons would probably avail themselves of this arrangement, no small benefit might thus accrue to the revenue.

No. 4.

ESTIMATE OF THE NUMBER OF CHARGEABLE LETTERS WHICH PASS THROUGH THE POST OFFICES OF THE UNITED KINGDOM IN A YEAR.

[The data on which this calculation is founded, are, 1st, The number of letters delivered in London and the suburbs, as far as the limits of the three-penny post ; 2nd, The amount of postage collected within that district ; and 3rd, The amount collected in the whole kingdom. As about one-fifth of the letters are post-paid, the amount of postage collected in the metropolitan district does not necessarily represent the total charges on the letters delivered in that district ; it may, however, be safely assumed that

the postage paid in advance on the letters delivered is balanced by the postage paid in advance on the letters collected in the district.]

The number of chargeable general post letters, brought into London by the mails in the course of a week, counting double and treble letters as one each, is at the present time (Nov. 1836) about.....	222,000
Of which the "forward letters," or those passing through London on their way to other post-towns, are about.....	36,000
Consequently the number of chargeable general post letters, delivered within the metropolitan district in a week, is about	186,000
The number of letters delivered by the two-penny and three-penny post in a week is, at present, about	270,000
Of which the general post letters included above are about	30,000
Consequently the number of two-penny and three-penny post letters delivered within the metropolitan district in a week is about	240,000
And the whole number of chargeable metropolitan letters in a week is about	426,000
Or per annum about.....	22,152,000
The amount of postage collected in the metropolitan district, in the year 1835, after deducting for returned letters, overcharges, &c., was as follows :	
* In the General Post department.....	£454,000
* In the Two-penny and Three-penny Post department	113,000
Total	£567,000
Being an average of about $6\frac{1}{4}d.$ per letter.	

* Finance Accounts for 1835, p. 54.

* The Amount of postage collected in the United Kingdom, in the year 1835, was £2,243,293, or about four times as much as that collected in the metropolitan district; consequently the whole number of chargeable letters which pass through the post offices of the United Kingdom in a year, may be assumed to be about $22,152,000 \times 4 = 88,608,000$.

Estimate of the Number of Franks passed through the Post Offices of the United Kingdom in a Year.

The number which arrive in London in the course of a week is, at the present time (Nov. 1836), about	53,500
The number dispatched from London in a week is about	41,200
	<hr/>
Total of franks passed through the London office in one week	94,700

As one-half of these probably are Government franks, the greater part of which pass through the London Post Office, the number of franks carried by the cross-posts, even in the parliamentary vacation, will of course be considerably below the proportionate number of chargeable letters conveyed by the cross-posts; that number, as estimated by the amount of postage,† is about two-thirds of the number passed (inwards and outwards) through the London office. The number of cross-post franks, including those received and dispatched by the Dublin Post Office,

* Finance Accounts for 1835, pp. 54 and 57.

† Ditto, p. 54.

will probably be about one-half of those passed through the London Office. Say	47,300
Making the whole number of franks per week	142,000
Or, per annum	7,384,000

Estimate of the Number of Newspapers passed through the Post Offices of the United Kingdom in a Year.

The number of newspapers dispatched by the London Post Office, per week, is, at the present time, about.....	305,000*
The number published in London is, probably, about 500,000 per week; consequently three in five are dispatched by the Post Office.	
The number of provincial papers published is probably about 900,000 per week; the proportion distributed through the provincial Post Offices, including those of Dublin and Edinburgh, is probably about three in ten; the number will therefore be about.....	270,000
Making the whole number of newspapers passed through all the Post Offices of the United Kingdom per week	575,000
Or, per annum	29,900,000
Say	30,000,000

No. 5.

ESTIMATE OF THE REVENUE WHICH WOULD BE DERIVED FROM THE POST OFFICE UNDER THE PROPOSED ARRANGEMENTS, ASSUMING

1. The number of chargeable letters to remain as at present.
2. That it increase two-fold.

* This number is rapidly increasing.

3. That it increase three-fold ; and so on to seven-fold.

In each case the number of franked letters and newspapers is supposed to remain as at present.

Though this calculation is necessarily founded to some extent on conjecture, it is confidently hoped that the caution used in making it has secured results not remote from truth.

It will be borne in mind, that the proposed arrangements provide for defraying the cost of distributing the franks and newspapers out of the postage received for letters ; also, that, as the cost of secondary distribution is to be met by a special charge exactly equal to such cost, both the cost and the receipts connected therewith may be altogether omitted in the calculation.

From this calculation (see next page) it appears that, supposing the number of chargeable letters to increase six-fold, the benefit to the Exchequer would be practically the same as at present ; and that, supposing it to increase seven-fold, that benefit would be augmented by about £280,000 ; while on the most unfavourable supposition, one indeed which can never be verified, viz. that the enormous reduction in postage should produce no increase whatever in the number of letters, the Exchequer would sustain scarcely any injury beyond the loss of its present revenue. In other words, while every individual in the country would receive his letters at an almost nominal expense, the whole management of the Post Office would bring upon the state a charge of only £24,000 per annum, and, as this would also cover the gratuitous distribution of franks and newspapers, it may fairly be considered as a mere deduction from the produce of the newspaper stamps.

Estimate of the Revenue which would be derived from the Post Office under the proposed arrangement.

	Present cost of primary distribution. (See page 14, column D.)	Estimated Cost of Primary Distribution, assuming the number of Newspapers and Franked Letters to remain under all circumstances as at present, but the number of Chargeable Letters, to be distributed, whether Chargeable Letters, Franks, or Newspapers, in the ratio of						
		1st. To remain as at present, viz. 88,608,000 per ann.	2nd. To increase two-fold. 1 $\frac{7}{10}$ to 1	3rd. To increase three-fold. 2 $\frac{4}{10}$ to 1	4th. To increase four-fold. 3 $\frac{1}{10}$ to 1	5th. To increase five-fold. 3 $\frac{8}{10}$ to 1	6th. To increase six-fold. 4 $\frac{5}{10}$ to 1	7th. To increase seven-fold. 5 $\frac{2}{10}$ to 1
Salaries and allowances	£ 222,510	£ 190,000	£ 209,000	£ 224,000	£ 230,000	£ 246,000	£ 255,000	£ 263,000
Allowances for special services and travelling charges	8,039	9,000	10,000	11,000	12,000	13,000	13,000	14,000
Conveyance of mails, &c.	135,919	179,000	223,000	267,000	310,000	354,000	354,000	398,000
Packet service, &c.	4,987	6,200	7,400	8,700	10,000	11,300	11,300	12,600
Tradesmen's bills, &c.	9,974	12,000	13,000	14,000	15,000	16,000	16,000	17,000
Rents, tithes, and taxes	4,085	4,700	5,200	5,600	6,000	6,400	6,400	6,800
Law charges	5,913	6,000	7,000	8,000	9,000	10,000	10,000	11,000
Stationery, printing, & postage	3,539	4,200	4,800	5,400	6,000	6,600	6,600	7,200
Superannuation allowances, &c.	30,248	30,248	30,248	30,248	30,248	30,248	30,248	30,248
Menai and Conway bridges (tolls).....	1,303	1,800	2,200	2,600	2,600	3,000	3,400	3,800
Total cost of primary dist. Receipts	426,517	393,094	462,148	526,848	582,548	647,248	705,948	763,648
		369,200	738,400	1,107,600	1,476,800	1,846,000	2,215,200	2,584,400
Net revenue or profit .....	.....	23,894	276,252	580,752	894,252	1,198,752	1,509,252	1,820,752
		Loss.						

No. 6.

PROBABLE INCREASE IN THE NUMBER OF LETTERS.

Which of the results exhibited in the preceding paper will be obtained by the measure contemplated, it is impossible to predict with certainty. Important material for conjecture, however, may be found in the following statement.

The sources of increase calculated upon are,

1. The virtual prevention of contraband conveyance.
2. An extension of the actual correspondence.

With respect to contraband conveyance, it is beyond all doubt that it is at present carried on to a very great extent. I have already stated (p. 34) that an extensive irregular distribution of letters is constantly proceeding in the manufacturing district around Birmingham; and it is well known that vast numbers are every day forwarded by carriers and coach proprietors. Not long ago there was seized in a carrier's warehouse one bag containing *eleven hundred letters*. Almost all parcels, especially such as are sent at stated times, (booksellers' parcels, for instance,) contain letters; and not unfrequently large packets are sent by coach, consisting of letters alone.

Again, the vast extent to which the trade of the country has increased within the last 20 years, must have been attended by a proportionate increase in the amount of mercantile correspondence, while the great spread of education, and increase of population during the same period, must have greatly augmented the correspondence of all kinds.

Attention may again be called to the fact mentioned at page 5, that an increase of more than a half has actually taken place in the revenues of the French Post Office since 1821; and it may be remarked, that in the 20 years during which our own Revenue has been practically stationary, that derived from the Post Office of the United States has more than tripled.*

* In each of the cases here cited, the revenue from our own Post Office inclusive, it is the *gross* revenue which is spoken of.

Now, as regards our own Post Office, the number of post letters during the last 20 years has not increased at all, it is manifest that the whole augmentation must have gone to swell the contraband conveyance. Nor is this surprising when we consider that the diminution in the price of almost all other articles has produced a virtual increase in the charge for postage; that the opportunities for such irregular conveyance have vastly multiplied; and that in consequence of the increasing difficulty in enforcing any law which is not strongly backed by public opinion, the risk incurred in this illicit practice is greatly reduced.

Now, it may be safely assumed that, practically speaking, all the letters at present conveyed in this irregular manner, will, by the proposed regulations, be brought to the Post Office.

Here also it may be remarked, that without interfering with the privilege of franking, the proposed reduction would tend greatly to relieve Members of Parliament and others from the importunity to which they are at present exposed, and thus convert no inconsiderable portion of the 24,000 daily franks into chargeable letters.

With respect to increase in the actual amount of correspondence, the proposed arrangements will bring two causes into operation, both very potent.

First.—Increased facility of communication.

Secondly.—Diminished expense.

On the potency of the former cause much light is thrown by the Report of the Commissioners of Revenue Inquiry, as quoted at page 46, and I may here especially refer to the fact, that the consequence of Mr. Palmer's improvements, which merely tended to increase *facility*, was, in the course of twenty years, to triple the correspondence of the country.

But the second cause would probably tend to the increase of correspondence even more than the first.

That the lowering of duties most decidedly tends to increase consumption, is proved by the fact, that in scarcely any instance has the loss to the revenue been in the same proportion as the reduction. Several instances were cited in the first page of this

little work showing that diminution in the rate of duty often occasions comparatively little decrease in its productiveness, while it is sometimes followed by an absolute increase.

It is manifest, however, that that which produces the increase of consumption is a decrease not in duty, but in *price*. It is of no practical importance to the consumer how this price is made up, and it is only in its tendency to lower the price, or, what is the same thing, to improve the quality, or increase the facility of purchase, that the diminution in duty concerns him.

As in all taxed articles, the price is made up of cost and duty, it is manifest that the lowering of the duty cannot in the same ratio lower the price. Thus, on a reduction of one-half in the duty on coffee, the price fell by only one-fourth. In the change here contemplated, on the other hand, our dealings are at once with price. We do not propose to lower the duty on the transmission of letters in the hope of obtaining a reduction in postage, but at once to reduce postage itself. In considering the effects of this change, therefore, we have nothing directly to do with the diminution of duty, but only with a decrease in price. And this circumstance, fortunately, saves us much laborious investigation, as decrease in price is often the compound result of diminution in duty and increase in facility of production. Taking, therefore, one or two articles of which, from whatever cause, the price has fallen, we will observe how far that reduction has resulted in increased consumption.

The price of soap, for instance, has recently fallen by about one-eighth; the consumption in the same time has increased by one-third. Tea, again, the price of which, since the opening of the China trade, has fallen by about one-sixth, has increased in consumption by almost a half. The consumption of silk goods, which, subsequently to the year 1823, have fallen in price by about one-fifth, has more than doubled. The consumption of coffee, the price of which, subsequently to 1823, has fallen about one-fourth, has more than tripled. And the consumption of cotton goods, the price of which, during the last twenty years, has fallen by nearly one-half, has in the same time been fourfolded.

If we might safely infer a general rule from these facts, it would appear that, to say the least, the increase in consumption is inversely as the squares of the prices. And a calculation founded on this rule would lead us to expect that, if the proposed average reduction in postage, viz., from 6*d.* to 1*d.* per letter, were effected, the number of letters would increase thirty-six fold; and perhaps it is not altogether beyond the bounds of possibility that a very long course of time should bring us to some such a result. Indeed, when we consider the immense increase which has taken place in travelling by water, wherever steam-boats have been brought into operation, and when we consider that the advantages which have led to this increase, viz., greater speed and certainty with reduced charges, are equally secured by the arrangements here proposed, this result is not quite so extravagant as might at first sight appear. Still, for many reasons, it would be quite erroneous to admit even the remote possibility of such an enormous increase into any practical consideration of the subject; nor indeed is there any temptation to speculate on such distant chances. A reference to the table which precedes these observations will show, that an increase not more than a sixth part of that, the remote possibility of which has just been glanced at, would be sufficient to retain the revenue in its present state, while a yet smaller increase is all that has been counted upon as probable.

It is important to observe that that increase in the number of letters which would sustain the revenue in its present state, does not require any addition to the present actual expenditure in postage.* All that is necessary to secure the revenue from any diminution is, that the public should be willing to expend as much in postage as at present. Now it would be very difficult, perhaps impossible, to point out any instance in which a reduction in the price of any particular article has not eventually, and even speedily, been followed by such an increase in demand, as

* To make this statement literally correct, a small allowance should be made to meet the expense of secondary distribution; and on the other hand, the present average postage should be given at 6½*d.* instead of 6*d.*

has at least sustained the total expenditure in that article at its former amount. In every one of the instances given above, all of which are of articles of very general consumption, the total expenditure, so far from being diminished by the decrease in price, has considerably increased, and in some instances the increase is very great. Thus on coffee, the price of which, as stated above, has fallen one-fourth, the public now expends more than twice as much as it did before the reduction. And, making every allowance for the progress of population and wealth, this increase, when considered as not on the consumption but on the actual expenditure, must be pronounced a very striking fact. Nor is it to be explained by supposing that coffee has superseded other beverages, for, during the very same time, there has been a corresponding increase in the amount expended on tea, malt liquor, and spirits; an increase manifestly attributable to the same causes.

In pursuing this question it will be convenient to consider the bulk of the letters written as arranged in two classes, viz., letters on business, and letters between friends and relations.

With respect to the former class, in addition to an immense number of letters at present forwarded by contraband conveyance, there is the large class of invoices, now sent most frequently with the goods to which they relate, but which, as I am informed by mercantile men whom I have consulted, would, under the new regulations, be invariably sent by post, as letters of advice.

Again, there are the lists of prices current, which, especially in commodities liable to frequent fluctuations, it is of importance should be received at short intervals.

Speaking of prices current, Lord Lowther, in his very able Report on the Post Office, says :

“ It is, I think, plainly shown by the evidence taken, that great advantage would arise to trade from the transmission of prices current at a small rate of postage. It is affirmed by various witnesses, that throughout the country there is a continually increasing desire among persons in trade for such information of the state of the markets in London and elsewhere as prices current would

afford. That the furnishing of this information is very much restricted by the high rate of postage, and that if it were more generally afforded, it is probable that much more business would be done. It is also stated, that the increase in the number transmitted at a low rate of postage would be such, that the Revenue required would be much greater than it now is under the high rate of postage,—one witness, Mr. Cook, estimating the increase, if allowed to be transmitted at a low rate of postage, at three millions of prices current annually.” *

Prospectuses too, such as are already issued to some extent by merchants, manufacturers, and shopkeepers, would become a very large class of post letters. For example, a manufacturer introducing some improved article, a shopkeeper receiving new patterns, or a bookseller issuing a new work, would gladly avail himself of any inexpensive means of immediate communication with every individual of the class from which he expected his customers.

The following is a statement in corroboration of these views, with which I have been favoured by Mr. Charles Knight, the publisher :

“ Upon the point on which you desire my opinion, with reference to the productiveness of the Post Office Revenue under a greatly reduced scale of charges, I have no hesitation in believing that if the rate of postage throughout the country were reduced to a penny, many hundreds of thousands of prospectuses of new books, and of publishers’ catalogues, would be annually circulated. In my own case, I should feel that such a mode of circulation would be by far the cheapest and most efficient plan of advertising. To be able to address the information which a prospectus communicates, with absolute certainty, to the persons likely to be interested in its perusal, would be a most advantageous method of advancing the distribution of books, and would obviate

* 5th Report of the Commissioners of Post Office Inquiry.—The date of Lord Lowther’s Report is May, 1835.

a great part of the difficulty which exists in putting such information effectually before the inhabitants of rural districts especially. If 2,000 such lists could be circulated monthly for about £8,—which they would be under your plan,—I should be too glad to spend £100 a year in placing these lists periodically in the hands of country booksellers, professional men, and literary societies ;—and I have no doubt that every publisher in London would feel it his interest to adopt the principle. Advertisements in the newspapers, however efficient and indispensable for attracting public attention to new books, are random shots which may or may not reach the individuals and classes for whom they are meant.”

Auctioneers' catalogues, announcements of sales, of changes of residence, of the opening of new establishments, of exhibitions, lectures, &c., and various other papers intended to attract the attention of distinct classes of the community, would in numberless instances be circulated by means of the post.

It is also important to observe, that it is very much the practice of tradesmen in managing their correspondence, to defer writing until they have such an accumulation of matter as will justify the expense of postage ; nay, in many instances I have known persons deterred by this expense from communicating important information until the period of its utility was past. Under the new arrangement the practice would be to write as each occasion arose ; and thus to distribute into several letters the matter now accumulated in one.

In most commercial establishments it is the rule not to receive an order, (unless post paid,) for less than a certain fixed amount ; and in some, where the profits are low, this amount is placed as high as 5*l*. Here the direct influence of the high rates of postage in reducing the number of letters, and in restricting trade, is manifest.

For the following statement, with reference to this part of the subject, I am indebted to Mr. Dillon, of the house of Morrison and Co.

“I have no doubt but that a very decided reduction in the rate

of postage would cause a very considerable increase in the number of trading and mercantile letters.

“We receive in the year many thousand letters; a large proportion of these are orders for goods, varying from some hundred pounds down to five pounds sterling; but if we execute an order lower than five pounds we *charge* the postage, so that practically five pounds becomes the minimum.

“At a rate of postage so low as one penny, a great number of explanatory letters on business, and letters on matters of detail, would be written. Occasions are of *constant* occurrence in which we do not write, and are not written to, because the matter, though important enough to write upon, is *not* important enough to pay, or to cause others to pay, the postage. I refer here to questions as to the mode of conveyance of goods, as to the colour or pattern of articles ordered, or to an ambiguous or an illegible phrase in a letter received, and a thousand other matters. These cases all imply double postage,—a letter and a reply.

“The sending *invoices* by post, (so that they should also serve as letters of advice,) instead of inclosing them in goods, would alone cause a great increase in the number of letters.

“In the higher class of mercantile transactions the increase of letters would perhaps be inconsiderable; but then the *actual* number of letters in such cases must necessarily be small. Wherever the *number* of letters is large, however important may be the transactions they refer to, I have no doubt but that economy is regarded, and that the number of letters is kept down by the *pressure* of a high tax. From the amount of the tax levied (which is notoriously large in comparison with the actual cost) economy in regard to postage has become a *habit* among mercantile men, and is made, so far as it goes, a point in mercantile education. The reducing the rate of postage so low as to make it an almost imperceptible item in relation to profits, would undoubtedly very materially increase the number of business letters.”

Another practice which obtains to some extent among tradesmen is this:—A shopkeeper in the country has occasion to transmit

orders to two or more London tradesmen ; these are frequently written on one large sheet, and addressed as a single letter to one party, who divides the sheet, and distributes the several parts. The whole number of such letters is perhaps not very large, but it may fairly be considered as the exponent of a multitude which are altogether suppressed by the restrictions which lead to such cumbrous artifices.

With respect to letters between friends, it may be first remarked, that the observation made above, with reference to the practice of waiting till there is such an accumulation of matter as will justify the expense of postage, applies with at least equal force here. There is oftentimes a desire to communicate at short intervals, as once or even twice per day, some single fact ; as the state of a person suffering under severe illness : and it would excite much surprise in those whose station places them quite above such considerations, to learn how high in the scale of society economy in postage is found to operate as an obstacle.

Nothing is more common than for persons in comfortable circumstances to write letters simply because they have had the good fortune to obtain franks, or to find opportunities for sending by private hand ; and when it is considered that a person residing in a distant town, a gentleman upon a tour, or a commercial traveller on his journey, could, at the expense of 30s. per annum, send a daily bulletin of his health and progress, some faint idea may be formed of the extent to which this species of correspondence is likely to increase. And here may be noticed, as corroborating this probability, the very common practice of sending a newspaper with some short phrase, single word, or conventional mark, illicitly inscribed, or at least conveying information by the hand-writing of the address.

Some years ago, when it was the practice to write the name of a member of parliament, for the purpose of franking a newspaper, a friend of mine, previous to starting on a tour into Scotland, arranged with his family a plan for informing them of his progress and state of health, without putting them to the expense of postage. It was managed thus :—He carried with him a number

of old newspapers ; one of which he put into the Post Office daily. The post-mark, with the date, showed his progress ; and the state of his health was evinced by the selection of the name, from a list previously agreed upon, with which the newspaper was franked. "Sir Francis Burdett," I recollect, denoted vigorous health.

In addition to the increased correspondence which, from the causes already stated, would arise amongst the present writers of letters, it must be carefully borne in mind that this species of communication would be made accessible to new classes, and those very numerous ones ; domestic servants, for instance, who constitute one of the most numerous classes of labourers, are, in general, so far removed from their friends, as to have little opportunity of personal communication. And when to this we add the separation occasioned by marriage, apprenticeship, the necessity of seeking employment, going to school, &c., we shall probably come to the conclusion that there are very few families to be found throughout the country, and more especially in the manufacturing districts, without some member, or, at least, some near relative, being so circumstanced as to create a desire for communication by letter. When, again, we consider that, from many causes, as, for instance, increased and increasing facility of travelling, growing knowledge, and rising spirit of adventure, this locomotive disposition is rapidly advancing ; and, again, that the very facility of communication here recommended would greatly stimulate its progress, it will be difficult to fix a limit to the amount of correspondence that may be looked for in this quarter. That the present very small amount of communication among the poorer classes is caused by their inability to meet the expense of postage, rather than by apathy or ignorance, will be abundantly shown by appealing to the experience of such Members of Parliament as hold any intercourse with the labouring classes.

I am indebted to Mr. Thornely, M.P. for Wolverhampton, for the following statement, which shows how oppressively the present rates of postage are felt by the poor.

"I was surprised to learn at the Wolverhampton Post Office how

many letters are detained for poor people till they can raise the amount of postage. The letter-carriers offer them in the first instance, and then they remain in the Post Office, perhaps two or three weeks, till the postage can be raised."

The following is an extract of a letter from Mr. Porter, of the Statistical department of the Board of Trade, which, while it tends to strengthen the probability of the above results, is valuable also for the view it takes of their moral importance.

"In the present, and still more, I trust, in the future condition of society in this country, post communication may be placed among the wants of the poor; but it is a want which now must for the most part be left ungratified. The opportunities which I have of procuring franks enable me to contribute towards keeping alive feelings of kindness and affection on the part of separated relatives which might otherwise become blunted or obliterated by disuse. May we not presume that many young persons of both sexes, who are continually drawn to this metropolis from distant parts of the kingdom, and are thenceforth cut off from communication with their early guardians, might, under different circumstances, be kept from entering upon vicious courses, to which the temptations are so great, and against which the restraints, in their case, are so few."

The vast importance (financially speaking) of opening the Post Office to these numerous classes, will appear on comparing the amount of revenue derived from the duty on those articles of which they are the principal consumers, with that obtained from articles, the use of which is limited to the wealthy. Thus, for instance, the duties on malt and ardent spirits (which, beyond all doubt, are principally consumed by the poorer classes) yield a yearly revenue of about thirteen millions, while the annual revenue obtained from wine (the beverage of the wealthy) is only seventeen hundred thousand pounds. The wish to correspond with their friends may not be so strong, or so general, as the desire for fermented liquors, but facts have come to my knowledge tending to show that, but for the high rate of postage, many a letter would be written, and many a heart gladdened too, where

the revenue and the feelings of friends now suffer alike. In one instance with which I became acquainted, a brother and sister, residing, the one at Reading, the other at Hampstead, had suspended intercourse for nearly thirty years; that they were deterred solely by considerations of expense is proved by the fact, that, on franks being furnished by the kindness of a member of parliament, a frequent interchange of letters was the immediate consequence.

How many who can write are thus prevented from exercising the art, and how many who would write are thus deprived of a strong motive for acquiring it, time alone will show; but a glance at what is now doing in popular education will discover the strength of the desire, and the evil of the prohibition.

One source of increase, though not, perhaps, of great pecuniary importance, should be here glanced at; viz., the rapidly increasing desire for the collection of statistical and general scientific information. Thus, the Society for the Diffusion of Useful Knowledge, by means of an extensive correspondence, collected a mass of most valuable matter relative to benefit societies. This inquiry probably would not have been commenced, and certainly would not have been completed, had not the Society had the command of franks. And many other inquiries relating, for instance, to education, to the practice of medicine; to various departments of science, as astronomy, meteorology, and geology; as also to general statistics, are, beyond all doubt, suppressed at present by the cost of postage. It is needless to enlarge on the importance of such inquiries to commerce, science, and good government.

From what has been advanced above, I hope it will appear,—

1. That without any addition whatever to the present number of letters written, there would, under the new regulations, be a great increase in the number legally conveyed, arising in some measure from the partial voluntary disuse of the franking privilege, but chiefly from virtual prevention of contraband conveyance.

2. That the number of post letters thus greatly increased, would further be multiplied, without any addition to the number of letter-writers, or even increase of letter writing, by the breaking up of one long letter into several shorter ones.

3. That a large number of papers, (chiefly printed) and now either not circulated at all, or distributed by hand, would be sent through the Post Office, as the most certain, most expeditious, and cheapest mode of conveyance. And

4. That in addition to all these important sources of increase, there would be an enormous enlargement in the class of letter writers.

But, in considering the subject of increase, it must be remembered, that however desirable, and however probable, a large increase may be, it is not counted upon as either certain or essential to the plan. The proposed regulations are not founded upon the presumption that, in their adoption, the revenue is secured from all risk of suffering. What I have endeavoured to show is,—

1. That it is very possible the revenue may not suffer at all ; and
2. That it is highly probable it will not suffer much.

To secure the Post Office revenue from any further injury than the slight increase in the expense of Post Office management, it is only necessary that the public should expend as much in postage after the proposed change as at present. And to establish the high probability, and indeed almost absolute certainty of this sustained expenditure, I may again refer to the striking fact, that it is scarcely possible to find a single instance where a reduction in the price of any article, or convenience, has been followed by a reduction in the amount expended thereon ; whilst in that which most nearly approaches the conveyance of letters, namely, the conveyance of persons and goods, the reverse is notoriously the case.

Supposing, however, that the Post Office revenue should suffer even a serious diminution, it can scarcely be doubted that the cheap transmission of letters and other papers, particularly commercial documents, would so powerfully stimulate the productive power of the country, and thereby so greatly increase the revenue in other departments, that the loss would be more than compensated.

In fine, while some risk is apparently justified by the present state of the general revenue, while the risk involved in the pro-

posed alterations is comparatively small, while there is even no inconsiderable chance of an eventual gain to the Post Office revenue, and little less than a certainty of a beneficial effect on the revenue taken as a whole, there is one thing beyond all doubt, namely, that the adoption of the plan will confer a most important, manifest, acceptable, and indisputable benefit on the country.

No. 7.

PAYMENT IN ADVANCE.

Fears have been expressed lest the proposed demand of payment in advance should be found objectionable to the public, and thereby prove restrictive of correspondence; and the late increase in the number of letters passing between this country and France is appealed to as confirmatory of these apprehensions.

But in respect to these letters, besides the option of not paying in advance being given, two unquestionably potent causes of increase have also been brought into operation; first, a reduction of postage, and secondly, increased facility of transmission. The existence of an option will undoubtedly have some influence upon the amount of correspondence; but the extent of influence will depend almost entirely upon the rate of postage. In the case of the French letters just named, where the lowest charge is thirteen pence, the effect is probably important; but the real question is, what would be the effect if the postage were one penny only? The pecuniary difficulty would unquestionably be slight, and the moral difficulty would be in a great measure removed by the knowledge that this demand was essential to the very low rate of postage; that the choice lies between the postage of a penny, payable in advance, and one perhaps of two-pence, payable upon the present plan.

Uniform payment of postage in advance, however, is not an untried experiment; it is the established plan in the presidencies of Bengal and Madras; and although the rate of postage is not low, being only one-third less than ours, the obligation to pay in

advance is not complained of by the residents, nor thought materially restrictive of correspondence. This fact is so decisive, that further argument may appear needless, but the importance of the subject makes me desirous to leave nothing belonging to it unexamined; I must therefore ask further indulgence of my reader.

For the purpose of forming an estimate of the extent to which the required payment in advance would affect the number of letters written, let us analyse the correspondence of the country, thus,—Letters may be primarily divided into letters which form part of a correspondence; and detached letters, *i.e.*, letters to which no answer is returned.

The letters which form part of a correspondence may be subdivided into—

1. Those of which each party to the correspondence pays for one, and,
2. Those of which one party to the correspondence pays for both.

The detached letters may be subdivided into—

3. Those paid for by the writer, and,
4. Those paid for by the receiver.

The first class, or that containing letters of correspondence, of which each pays for one, comprises probably five-sixths of the whole number of letters conveyed, and would be practically unaffected by the plan of invariable payment in advance; for it is obvious that so long as each party pays for one letter, it can be of no consequence whether he pays on the dispatch of his own, or on the receipt of his correspondent's.

As regards the second class, *viz.*, the letters to which answers are given, but of which one party to the correspondence pays for both, the party paying may be the correspondent who writes first, or he who writes last. If the correspondent who writes first is desirous of paying the postage of both letters, he might easily accomplish this, under the proposed arrangements, by inclosing in his letter a stamped cover, to free the answerer; or if the other correspondent wished to pay for both letters, he might enclose a

stamped cover in his reply. If to save another so small a charge as a penny were considered a matter of propriety, the means here described would soon be established by custom; the stamped cover being enclosed and received without remark. It appears, then, that the second class of letters, as well as the first, would not be affected by the obligation to pay the postage in advance.

The third class, that containing the detached letters which are paid for by the writer, is obviously provided for by the proposed arrangement.

The fourth class, or that containing the detached letters which are now paid for by the receiver, is therefore the only class which presents any difficulty.

With reference to this class it may be remarked that it is exceedingly small, containing, probably, not so many as one letter out of twenty; and even of this small number the probability is, that few would be affected by the regulation in question. The class consists chiefly of orders for goods, or instructions to tradesmen and others, which partake of the nature of orders. I can scarcely think that the necessity for paying the postage of one penny could interfere to prevent the sending of such letters to any appreciable extent; but should it ever so operate, the dealers, rather than have their business thus obstructed, would soon make it their practice to allow the postage of orders, &c., in deduction from the amounts of their bills.

The remainder of this class of letters consists, I believe entirely, either of such as ought not to be sent unpaid, as letters soliciting orders, subscriptions, &c.; or such as ought not to be sent at all, as those written by vindictive people for the purpose of putting the receivers to the expense of postage. If the postage were necessarily paid in advance, many of the first description of letters would be sent post-paid; the remainder, together with the whole of the second description of letters, would undoubtedly be suppressed: but this, so far from being an objection, is no inconsiderable recommendation to the proposed plan. It would deprive the thoughtless, the impertinent, and the malicious, of a means of annoying others, which is now but too often resorted to;

and no one, I presume, would regret the small amount of revenue which would be sacrificed in obtaining so desirable a result.

It appears, then, that whenever an interchange of communication shall take place under the proposed arrangements, the expense of postage may be divided between the two parties, or defrayed entirely by one or by the other, as may be mutually agreed upon, which is precisely the state of things at present; but that when the communication is one-sided, the obligation to pay the postage will lie with the writer instead of the receiver of the letter; and this, in my opinion, is a change very much wanted, as no one ought to have it in his power to compel another to incur an expense, however small. But this desirable restriction will, I contend, operate very rarely to prevent correspondence, and in no instance disadvantageously to society; for with every desire to examine the question fairly and candidly, I really am at a loss to discover any case in which it is desirable for one person to write to another at the expense of the latter, and in which, under a rate of postage almost nominal, necessity, or good feeling, would not secure a reply.

But if, in some cases beyond my foresight, the principle of uniform payment in advance should prove restrictive of legitimate correspondence, a counterbalance will be found in the removal of those feelings of delicacy towards the purse of one's friend, on the one hand, and his feelings, on the other, which at present so often prevent the sending of a letter. The experience of every Member of Parliament will prove that numberless applications for franks are made on such grounds.

The result of a very careful examination of the subject is the conviction that the proposed payment in advance would probably not be restrictive of correspondence at all, and certainly not to any appreciable extent; unaccompanied by a reduction of postage, and an accelerated rate of delivery, it undoubtedly would meet with great opposition, but this is not the measure proposed.

Perhaps, indeed, without requiring payment in advance, the rates of postage might be reduced to two-pence, but the delivery could not be rapid; and surely there can be no doubt whether

the public would prefer a delay in payment entailing a slow delivery and a postage of two-pence, or a payment in advance that would secure a rapid delivery at the postage of one penny. The wish of the public is only the aggregate of the wishes of individuals; and I cannot imagine that any man can desire to subject himself to a charge of two-pence, instead of a penny, for the privilege of exercising the like extortion on others.

However, if, after all, it should be thought unwise at once to attempt the universal application of the principle of payment in advance, I would submit the following arrangement for consideration; stating at the same time, that I have great doubts of the policy of adopting it in preference to the other plan, even as a temporary expedient.

Let the public exercise an option between using the stamped covers, as described at page 41, and sending the letters uncovered and *unpaid*. Under this arrangement the financial accounts would lie between the central office and the *distributors* of letters; as there could be no necessity for giving a further option of paying the postage in money on putting the letter into the office, there would be no such accounts between the central office and the *receivers* of letters. Still, as the distributors are much more numerous than the receivers of letters, accounts would be increased in number. Let the postage of such letters be something higher than the price of stamped covers, say a penny more, that is, two-pence for half an ounce. Let the unpaid letters be kept separate from the others throughout their progress, for the sake of convenience in making out the accounts. On the arrival of the bags at the place of destination, let the stamped letters be first assorted and dispatched for delivery; then let the unpaid letters be accounted for, assorted, and dispatched for delivery by another letter-carrier; or by the same on his return, after completing the first delivery. In country places, where the houses are scattered, and the letters few, one delivery might serve for all.

Under this arrangement, the rapid delivery, to secure which I have proposed the payment in advance, would still be secured as regards the stamped letters; while the higher charge for the unpaid

letters, and their late delivery (the unavoidable, not factitious consequences of their being unpaid) would, I think, in a short time, so greatly reduce their number, that the option might be withdrawn without difficulty. The expense to the Post Office resulting from this anomaly might be reduced, if necessary, by restricting the delivery of unpaid letters to once per day, in places enjoying a plurality of deliveries, selecting for this purpose the most convenient hour of the day. And for the sake of simplicity in the accounts, I would recommend that the option should be confined to letters not exceeding half an ounce in weight, so that the postage on each should be an invariable sum. No one could object to this restriction, as the conveyance of greater weights is for the most part a novelty.

It has been urged as an objection to the required payment in advance, that it would destroy the security for the delivery of letters which is now derived from the letter-carrier having to account for the receipt of postage—that an idle letter-carrier might destroy the letters to save himself the trouble of making his round. In reply to this objection I would remark, that the present security, such as it is, applies only to part of the correspondence, there is nothing to prevent the destruction of franked or paid letters. But it is said that a letter-carrier is now obliged to make his round for the delivery of the unpaid letters, and, therefore, that as it would save but little trouble, there is slight temptation to destroy the others. As regards an important part of the correspondence, it appears then, that, under the present arrangements, the only security afforded for the delivery of the letters is that the letter-carrier is obliged to make his round. Now let us examine the security afforded by the proposed arrangements. At page 76 a plan is suggested which will enable any one, for a small fee, to obtain a receipt for any letter put into the Post Office. The fee is so trifling, (only a half-penny,) and the trouble would be so little, that there can be no doubt the plan would come into extensive operation. Every letter-carrier would therefore know that, as regards many of his letters, receipts had been taken, and that if any of these letters were destroyed, inquiry and detection would

certainly follow ; he would therefore, as at present, be obliged to make his round. But he would have no means of distinguishing the receipted from the unreceipted letters, (there is no difficulty in distinguishing the paid from the unpaid letters,) therefore he would be careful to deliver all.

It follows, then, that the proposed arrangements are superior to the present as a security against idleness on the part of the letter-carrier. It is needless to point out their superiority against his dishonesty : the collection of the postage is no security against the abstraction of a money letter if the contents exceed the postage.

In conclusion, I may observe, that the proposed payment in advance would effect a material reduction in the number of returned letters, and save the public the expenses attendant upon them. The returned, refused, mis-sent, and re-directed letters, and over-charges for the year 1835, cause a reduction on the gross revenue amounting to no less than £110,000.

Coleridge tells a story which shows how much the Post Office is open to fraud, in consequence of the option which now exists. The story is as follows.

“One day, when I had not a shilling which I could spare, I was passing by a cottage not far from Keswick, where a letter-carrier was demanding a shilling for a letter, which the woman of the house appeared unwilling to pay, and at last declined to take. I paid the postage ; and when the man was out of sight, she told me that the letter was from her son, who took that means of letting her know that he was well : the letter was *not to be paid for*. It was then opened, and found to be blank !” *

This trick is so obvious a one that in all probability it is extensively practised.

* Letters, Conversations, and Recollections of S. T. Coleridge, vol. ii., p. 114.

No. 8.

INTRODUCTION OF THE PLAN.

With the view of combining, as far as possible, the advantages of the tentative method with those attendant on the immediate and entire development of the plan, the following mode of bringing it into operation is submitted.

That the whole plan be made the subject of one enactment, commissioners being appointed with the requisite powers for carrying it into effect; and being authorized to introduce the changes in such manner as may appear to them expedient, agreeably to the arrangement adopted in the case of the Poor Law Commission.

Considerable time would manifestly be required before the plan could be brought into general operation. Meanwhile, and, indeed, this should be the first step taken, the measure could be applied to some particular distribution. It is recommended that this should be the local distribution of the metropolitan district, or that which is now conducted in the twopenny-post department, which includes the threepenny-post delivery.

There are many reasons why this district should have the preference. To its extent and importance are added the advantages of a Post Office Establishment distinct in almost all its parts from the General Post, with distinct receiving-houses, (except in the suburbs,) and distinct accounts; while, in common with other such districts, it is relieved from the variableness of charge depending on the number of enclosures.

The priority assigned to London, too, could excite no jealousy, as the alteration would merely place the metropolis on a level with many other districts. It is, perhaps, needless to remark, that it is no part of the plan, in this stage of its operation, to alter the rate of general postage.

Again, by selecting this district, the experiment would be brought under the immediate observation of Government. Little more change would be required than to reduce the postage, whether of twopence or threepence, say to a penny, per two ounces; to admit packages not exceeding one pound in weight;

to require payment in advance, by either of the modes pointed out at page 37; to employ the short stages for the conveyance of the mails, their complete fitness for which has been demonstrated by the successful arrangements of the West India Dock Company; (as already stated;) and by these and other means which may readily be devised, to secure more frequent, rapid, and economical distribution.

As some parts of the district within the range of the threepenny-post ought, from the thinness of their population, to be placed under the arrangements for secondary distribution, (described at page 55,) this first application of the plan would try its working in all the important parts.

Finally, if this first step should show the necessity of any modification of the plan previous to its being brought into general operation; and if such modification should not have been provided for by the powers conferred on the Commissioners, the necessity for an amendment of the act would have been made so manifest that I conceive there would be no difficulty in effecting the required change. There would be nothing to undo, except to amend an act which had not been carried into effect, as the practicability of the proposed reduction of postage in the metropolitan district is undoubted, the whole cost of management, even under the present expensive arrangements and restricted correspondence, being only two-thirds of a penny per letter. To effect such a relief from taxation, and to render the facilities of communication adequate to the wants of the people in a district containing about one-twelfth of the population of the United Kingdom, would of itself be an immense improvement.

Ect
P8584

13512

Author

The post office of fifty years ago.

Title

NAME OF BORROWER.

University of Toronto
Library

DO NOT
REMOVE
THE
CARD
FROM
THIS
POCKET

Acme Library Card Pocket
Under Pat. "Ref. Index File"
Made by LIBRARY BUREAU

